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CHARMING TO HER LATEST DAY

A Novel

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BY

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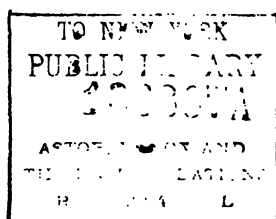


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CHARMING TO HER LATEST DAY

CHAPTER I.

"MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE; THE MISSES TEMPLE"

SOMETHING over fifty years ago there fell vacant at the other end of this town a large house with a spacious and splendid garden. Its original proprietor had lived in it for sixty years, and, being a man of great wealth and fine taste, he had transformed what was once a comfortable family residence into a mansion, filled with all luxuries, and surrounded with green-houses, hot-houses, vineries, stables, coach-houses, and all the other appurtenances of a grand house. He died, and his hundreds of thousands ran off in a golden river of good luck to a nephew in the north of England, who had his own estate. Immediately the question was asked in our little provincial set, "Who will take The Beeches?" for by that simple name the mansion was known. Everybody was afraid of The Beeches; afraid of its gilded rooms, its noble halls, its green-houses, hot-houses, vineries, stables, and coach-houses aforesaid; afraid of its splendid traditions, gone, we felt, never to return; afraid of comparison with the former owner—a poor, sickly shadow in later days, but even then such a lord at the head of his table, such a judge of wines, so plentiful with

his choice vintages, too ; such an expert in gardeners and cooks, as our town of Kettlewell never saw before, and was never likely to see again. So the great house stood vacant, month after month, and year after year, haunted by no ghost except memories of magnificence, which did, indeed, seem to glide through the vast, damp rooms, down the wide stairs, or through the noble gardens, now returning to wilderness season by season. Everybody was afraid of The Beeches. We all said, "The Beeches will never let again."

Let it did, however. There came a little lady one day, erect, commanding in her manner, and rich in her attire. She asked to see the house. She went from room to room, and marked with approving eye how glorious was the place; and sharply she inquired of the agent if there was any reason why the house had not let, except the alleged one of its extraordinary grandeur. He assured her that there was none. At this she broke into a little laugh, which meant, "Kettlewell people must be fools." "What rooms for dancing!" she ejaculated. "What staircases, up and down!" And then she set her own dapper figure in one of the glasses of the console-tables, and murmured, "Admirable, admirable taste!" "I shall take this house," she cried aloud, as she set her foot on the threshold. And as she went from room to room she kept repeating, "I shall take this house." "Bed-room," "dressing-room," "morning-room," "library," "boudoir," "servants' hall." With such words of assignment on her lips she went about, and the whole mansion was allotted to separate uses when she had completed her inspecting tour. She came back into the empty dining-room, and the young man who, full of awe, had followed her round the house, heard her say to herself, "Oh, what a room for a dance!" Then he, going out on some errand, and suddenly returning, saw the little dame step down the

empty floor in some formal dance, most mystic in his eyes, and bowing with aristocratic grace to some invisible partner. The young man recalled his own hops at the citizens' ball, and wondered what this grave measure could be. But the little lady pulled up all of a sudden, with a whistle of her silks, and repeated for the fiftieth time, "I shall take this house."

"Mrs. Barbara Temple," was her reply, when the agent asked her name. She delivered it with decided emphasis, as if the syllables might be pondered ; and forthwith she gave orders for many things to be done to the house and grounds, saying that she would come in next month. You may be sure we were all alive with curiosity to know everything about Mrs. Barbara Temple. She turned out to be a widow—a widow for the second time, we heard—and with three daughters. She had first married an old man of vast wealth, who died when she was two-and-twenty, leaving her with no children, and a great fortune settled on her. Next, to avenge herself for the privations of her first marriage, she allied herself to a young ensign of twenty-five, handsome and penniless. With him she lived happily for seven years, during which time she gave birth to three daughters. Then the young officer died ; and so, having got a fortune by the first husband, and a family by the second, Mrs. Barbara Temple was now making ready to lead the remainder of her life according to her own heart.

The family came into residence on the last Friday in April, 1838. Nothing was seen of them, you may guess, on Saturday, and everybody was on tiptoe expectation for their entry into the parish church on Sunday morning. Thither they came, regularly enough, like good worshippers, having, by the way, spoiled the worship of every-

body else. First comes my little dame, natty and brisk, and with something in her movements that made you fancy she must be a puppet animated by enchantment. Silks, feathers of the rarest sort, a fan—the weather being hot—and her frame braced up into such erectness that each of her inches was worth two; so Mrs. Barbara Temple walked into church. There was spirit in the eye which went round the building, not with unpleasing boldness, but with most unmistakable courage. There was a vigor in her step which told of a good constitution, and she held her fan in a way that signified temper. Indeed, when the pew-opener blundered over the latch of the door, and kept her waiting in the aisle, she dealt one glance at the woman—one only—but what a rebuke was in it! At sight of the flash, old Sparking, the doctor, who had been watching the new-comer rather obtrusively, was struck with fear that he might catch the next; and he dropped into his prayer-book like a bird shot in mid-air, trying to look as if he had seen nothing since service began. Three daughters came behind. The first impression they gave us was of a profusion of rich dress, chosen and worn with taste which was simply faultless. The next impression was of tallness of figure, the more conspicuous for the tiny dame who led the way. The third impression was of beauty, set out in style and fashion such as our little town could not rival; and we did not think ourselves provincial in any but the geographical sense. After this, we had time to judge and praise the beauties, girl by girl.

Girl the first walked with a mincing step, and a toss of her head which, though strictly within the limits of good breeding, was noticeable and significant. Clever she looked, too, and her eyes were clear gray, eyes that

could search you—and did search you—reading your face with great rapidity and apprehension. She was the most striking figure of the three, being very tall and with splendid shoulders. Her face, it is true, would not bear much looking into; and had you taken it feature by feature, as the children were taught to break the fagot in the fable, you might have proved it a poor face enough. But taken in its wholeness, and set upon that superb bust, it was a face which I should not have recommended a young fellow to gaze at too long unless he meant matrimony. And then her dress—her dress! Oh! never tell me that a woman cannot double—treble—her looks if she has money in her pocket and taste in her eye.

But the next was prettier; indeed, pretty was not the word appropriate to a woman who was unquestionably handsome, who knew her beauty and was proud of it. The second Miss Temple had a nose of most exquisite shape; large, melting eyes of gray, ready to turn to blue; and she had a lovely mouth, perhaps with a little too much of the chisel about it, too finely finished, wanting in expression, and with a slight hint of disdain carved on its fine corners. Beauty, professed beauty, confessed beauty, and clad to distraction; so she glided into her pew, and we had time to consider girl the third.

Girl the third! Shall I ever forget her face, then in the first sweet flush of youth? Shall I ever forget the light that shone in those deep, serious eyes?—the thousand possibilities of tender or delicate expression that seemed to hover around that mouth, ready to alight and unfold themselves whenever summoned? I had been thinking a thousand frivolous and misplaced thoughts, but something in this face restored me, by the most delightful of recalls, to the mood of a worshipper. Never,

never, outside Heaven, shall I see such a face again. 'It was like the dream of a painter, and he a painter whose fancy had drunk of some celestial stream of feeling and idea, until he had caught on his canvas a face which had in it all that could be earthly in a thing of Heaven. Laugh not at me, neither call me irreverent, if I say that one could have fancied her some painted Madonna descending from the walls of a church, taking human form, and wearing modern vesture. On this girl vesture gave you no hint of fashion; her countenance etherealized her attire, so that she might have been wearing an angel's floating drapery instead of the last Paris fashion. But I see you smile; and is not every rare emotion bound to hide itself, lest, being seen, it should be ridiculed for eccentricity?

Those eyes could shine with earthly or heavenly love. In each case it would be love—deep, pure, intense—with not a thought of evil on its white and living page. That mouth could kiss as daughter or mistress or mother, and who could foretell which kiss would be sweetest from one who seemed fit to perform every womanly duty in the most womanly way? In her look there was something neither of age nor youth, but of what I should try to describe as fulness; the meridian of nature, when the early and the later sentiments meet, in equal strength, the simplicity of youth, the graveness of serious life. She was fair, and her hair light brown; and I saw a trace of a little foot as she turned into her pew. But when she knelt and covered her face, I did the same quite unconsciously. It seemed right after the vision of her.

CHAPTER II.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY WHO WAS AT HOME IN THIS WORLD

THAT week everybody called upon the Temples. The universal impression was favorable, and we all rejoiced over so vivacious an addition to our society; and already the question was flying from lip to lip among the ladies, "Whom will the Misses Temple marry?" That on the grounds of social position and education the new-comers would stand high among us was not doubted for a moment; while their easy fortune was proclaimed by their dress, the furniture of their house, and their manner of life generally. Each successive visitor had something new to tell. One remarked how finely the furniture and ornaments were fancied. Another marked the glories of the harp and the piano. "The pictures are lovely," said a third—"not a poor one on the walls!" And carpets and oil-cloths and the coloring of the walls came in for commendation in due course. All of us were delighted with the lively conversation of the girls; and we marvelled unanimously at Mrs. Temple's wide knowledge of the world, and the briskness with which she uttered it. Nor was one of these praises undeserved. The drawing-room of the Temples was a charming contrast to most of those around. Ease, cultivation, liveliness—whatever is choicest in social intercourse—seemed to pervade the very air; and you felt as you entered the room that you

had passed into a region where refinement reigned supreme. The Temples were, somehow, above us all. We felt it; and with increasing diffidence, as we realized our inferiority, was the question asked, "*Whom* will the Misses Temple marry?"

But old Sparking, who was our shrewdest head by a long way, hearing this question asked at Miss Whiffin's house one afternoon, remarked, with a comical face to fix our attention, that we had not disposed of the mother yet. Surprising that so natural a thought had not suggested itself before! Mrs. Temple, as we understood, had been married very early; and our most competent female critics declared that she could not be more than forty-five—or, rather, I should say, they put it that she could not be less. We had several widows and spinsters of ripe years, and these agreed that forty-five was still a marrying age; indeed, some of the ladies declared that it was the best time of all, an opinion in which Sparking concurred with much vehemence and solemnity, only the old fellow was caught winking slyly at a confidential friend immediately after, which aroused some suspicion. That Mrs. Barbara Temple might be married before any of her daughters, that she was yet an attractive and marrying woman, we all admitted. There was that in her manner with men which told that she had not yet abandoned either the hope or the methods of conquest; and it was plain to us all that less likely women are married every day of the year. Besides, the fortune was hers—absolutely—as we had discovered on undoubted testimony; and since the fortune could not be less than three thousand a year, we began to see that for the present it was Mrs. Temple, not her daughters, who was likely to be the prize in our next matrimonial race. So, having

settled this in our minds, we proceeded, like rational beings, to choose a husband for the animated widow; and, with scarcely a dissentient opinion, we came to the conclusion that our rector, the Reverend Anthony Brent, would be the happy man. We were not altogether wrong in this conjecture, as my story shall disclose. But Mr. Brent does not emerge on our historic page at present.

Let me tell you that, in the course of a long life, I have never met a woman who could match Mrs. Barbara Temple. Cleverer women, handsomer women, wittier women, I have met in scores; but the secret of Mrs. Barbara Temple was her utter and hearty love of this present world. Of this present world she was, I believe, the sincerest and most unquestioning worshipper that ever lived. She put no strain upon herself to become what she was; she quenched no aspiration and repressed no misgiving. Worldliness was the simple, honest expression of her natural disposition and her judgment on affairs. Never religious devotee was so completely enclosed in a creed as she. For, indeed, it was a creed, and a life, too, and Mrs. Barbara Temple loved the world just as a flower loves sunlight: she obeyed a law of her own nature. But the cheerfulness with which she obeyed it; her unquestioning faith in the power of the world to satisfy every want; the absence of suspicion that there could be any higher motive in life, or, indeed, any other motive at all; and the cheerfulness and alacrity with which she followed out her convictions, made her, of necessity, a vigorous and original character. All that makes what such people call "the world" she longed for and prized. Accomplishments, money, taste, health, the good opinion of society—these, and a thousand kindred matters, she regarded severally

as constituents of happiness, to be sought with the utmost solicitude every hour of the day. She was grateful to the world for being what it was to her—an ever-running fountain of desire or pleasure. When you first saw her in the day she was ready for talk or amusement; and with unflagging enthusiasm she went from hour to hour, entering upon each new scene of the daily round as fresh as if she had just been awakened from a pleasant sleep. Till the last light was put out at night she showed no symptoms of weariness or abated zest. *After* the last light was put out I used sometimes to wonder what she would think of, when her dresses and jewels were laid aside, and the long hours lay in dark and silent succession before her. But whatever thoughts or dreams troubled her, all vanished with the morning. She rose again, elastic and bounding, and a new day was a new life to her.

More than once I have watched her face at church when the clergyman read out that verse, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world"; and I have wondered what she would make of it. For Mrs. Barbara Temple went to church regularly, and treated religion with deference, at least so long as religion confined itself within sacred walls and hours. In general conversation the barest allusion to what are sometimes called "serious" subjects was resented by her so palpably that such an indiscretion was never repeated by the same offender. Her belief, however, might have been fully expressed in the words, "Love the world; for, in the name of common-sense, what is there besides worth loving?" How she adjusted this creed with what she had heard said or read in church—which she never quarrelled with—I cannot imagine. She had her own opinion, I am sure; for she was no dunce. At one time or another she must have men-

tally compared her ways and thoughts with those of others, and the match of herself she never could have found. England could not have produced a woman who could have reassured her, or confirmed her in her belief, by saying, "I think so too." But whatever she thought, or whatever she expected in the future, her faith and practice never wavered. She worshipped the world, trusted it to the uttermost ; and she was convinced that it could and would do for her all that she desired.

Have I sufficiently sketched her figure? Will a few strokes more make her a clearer image in your mind's eye? She was short, as I have said, trimly built, perhaps a trifle too stout, but that might be disputed. Her nose was rather large, but finely cut, like her second daughter's, and she dressed her brown hair in short ringlets which well suited the style of her face. Her color was good, and high enough to make people ask questions ; and her eyebrows were not free from suspicious traces of making-up. Her dress was always rich and admirably suited to her figure and years, for she was careful to look full forty-five. She avoided all absurd affectation of youth ; and although a kind of sprightly dancing step, which she often fell into, might have seemed rather a fault in this direction, most of us considered this gait nothing but surplus vitality acting on a frame so light and plump that it seemed made to skip, or bound like a ball.

CHAPTER III.

CONTAINS A PREACHER, TEXT, SERMON, AND CONGREGATION
ALL OUT OF THE COMMON

MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE was fully determined to train up her children in the way they should go. What that way was she knew well. It was the way she had gone herself, and from which she had never departed ; she could describe its every turn and corner with the confidence of an expert ; and she could laud its glories with the fervor of a believer.

Her favorite hour with her girls was before lunch, when they would all assemble in the library. While the light pursuits of the morning occupied their eyes and fingers, the mother would con over the events of yesterday, or anticipate those of the coming afternoon and evening. Every sentence she let fall was salted with her own philosophy, for no preacher of righteousness ever improved occasions more diligently than did this little woman ; nor was ever preacher more in earnest, for to the very tips of her fingers she was packed full of one conviction—that the improvement and enjoyment of the life that now is form the whole duty of man.

The girls were all clever and of independent mind. While they could not but be influenced by the doctrine they heard, yet they received it not slavishly, but with such private stipulations and adjustments as suited their own wishes and intentions. The eldest—Caroline—was

decidedly bookish, with a liking for masculine studies; and she was now, by the help of one of Hamilton's translations, teaching herself Virgil. Sibyl—the handsome daughter—was fond of painting, and would sketch anything, from a cluster of grapes to a landscape. She was fond of painting fancy head-and-shoulder portraits of pretty women, and among portraits of pretty women was fondest most of all of painting her pretty self. Sophia, the youngest—the angelic girl—was musical, but with a taste for reading too; and Mrs. Barbara Temple used to say that if only Sophia could be once made to feel the importance of life, she would be the most brilliant of the three, and the happiest. What happiness signified in this little woman's vocabulary, readers can guess for themselves.

Here sit the family, then, upon a fine May morning. Caroline had her books spread out before her—a grammar, a dictionary, and the Virgil, with the translation of the benevolent Mr. Hamilton underlining the Latin. She is looking out her nouns and verbs, and as she finds each she notes it down in the sweetest of pocket-books—a minikin monitor in morocco which is always with her, and into which she peeps night and morning, before she sleeps and when she wakes, tripping off a column of Latin with careful face and lips. Sibyl sits apart, and before her stands a small table on which is set—a mirror! She is transferring the vision of the glass upon the paper before her. "Portrait of a Lady one hundred and twenty-oneth," Caroline laughingly cries, at which her sister, glancing up undaunted from her task, asks if Carry can say the first declension yet. Sophia, with sweet, grave face and down-set eyes, is reading Shakespeare. Mrs. Barbara Temple, who never can be still, is walking up and down the room,

looking at her daughters with admiration, or pausing to see how Sibyl is getting on, but all the time preaching with wonderful energy.

"Lecture morning, dear," Sibyl whispered, in a roguish whisper, to Sophia, as their mother entered the room. She saw homiletics in the maternal eye. "We shall have firstly, secondly, thirdly, and the conclusion of the whole matter, to-day"; at which Sophia laughed and blushed, divided between fun and fear.

"You are good girls, all of you," the little woman said, as she paced the carpet. "I am proud of you all, but I *cannot* make you serious. You don't—and won't—understand the value of youth and the preciousness of time and opportunity."

"But, mamma," Caroline remarked, looking in the dictionary for some irregular verb whose pedigree had quite baffled her, "we do try to improve the time; I am sure we do!"

"Caroline, dear, do take that pen out of your mouth!" cried the little lady. "You need not look like a grocer's clerk; *they* don't learn Latin!"

"I never shall find it," poor Caroline murmurs, as she lays her pen on the table, with a doleful face. "I wish they would not make Latin dictionaries so very hard."

"Now last night, when Lady Rafter was giving us that account of Paris, not one of you girls was listening," Mrs. Temple said, resuming her discourse. "You paid not the smallest attention."

"Old frump!" ejaculated Sibyl, with a splendid lip of disdain. "Who wants to hear of her stupid parties?"

"Don't call names, Sibyl," the mother said sharply. "Any one can be called names. We don't know what is said of us. *I* have been called frump myself!"

"Perhaps ; but you are not a frump," Sibyl replied, rising from her chair and standing before her mother with a kind of comic affection, while with her brush she paints an ideal face in the air. "There ! is that a frump ? Is that like Lady Rafter ?"

"You don't understand me, child," the mother answered. It was evident she was not displeased. "What I want to impress upon you is this. If you call people what they know they are not, they may forgive you ; but when you give persons their right name, if it happens to be a bad one, they will remember it against you forever. Lady Rafter being our friend, it is not prudent or right to call her a frump ; it is so very obviously the right name for her. Now if you had called her a flirt—"

"A flirt, mamma !" all the girls called out in concert. Even grave Sophia smiled at the idea.

"Well, dears," the little woman replied steadfastly, though a wilful smile twitched at the corner of her mouth, "if Lady Rafter were to hear that you called her frump, she would be angry ; if she heard that you called her a flirt, she would be pleased. It is human nature. Now, if you must speak evil of your friends, let it be that sort of evil that will gratify their vanity. People will forgive you for calling them wicked ; for calling them ridiculous—never."

"Suppose they don't forgive us," Sibyl remarked haughtily—"what then ?"

"A great deal," the mother answered, seizing the opening for argument. "Every enemy you make in the world is an addition to your failures in life. We are sent into this world to please and to be pleased ; or, if you like to put it selfishly, you can say we are sent to please ourselves, and we please ourselves best by pleasing others."

That is what I want to impress on you girls : live to please."

"Yes," Sibyl remarked, "but not Lady Rafter. When I want to please I shall not think of her."

"Lady Rafter among the rest," the mother answered. "Please everybody as far as you can ; make it the study of your life—morning, noon, and night—to be agreeable. Remember, girls," continued the little woman, standing in the centre of the room to deliver her lecture with more effect—"remember, a great responsibility is laid on us women. To us is committed the ornamental, the charming, side of life. We have not to make the money, nor to fight the battles, nor to take the university degrees—"

"I wish we might," Car sighed, under her breath.

"Nor to make the fortunes. We have to enjoy and to adorn. That is the position assigned to us by—by—by the Almighty, I suppose ; and I should like to make my daughters consider it their perpetual aim in life to give pleasure, to be agreeable, to be amiable ; in every character, scene, and duty to be—charming !"

"Never to please one's self," murmured Sibyl, rebelling at this hard doctrine.

"*Always* to please one's self," retorted the little woman courageously. "You will find that your own enjoyment is heightened by the consciousness of power to please others. Yes, girls, make it your rule of life, and you will never regret it. Let this be ever before your mind : 'I am a creature formed to give pleasure.' Be courteous ; be gentle ; be refined ; be sweet in all your dealings. Never lose your temper ; it ruins the face, and it always leaves a disagreeable impression, which nothing quite rubs out. Depend upon it, the men may respect those creatures who are called women of character, which generally means

women who perform duties awkwardly which, with a little thought, they might perform in a charming way ; men may respect them, but when they want enjoyment they turn to women who study the art of pleasing. Now what I want to teach you all is, to be solid and pleasing too. Believe me, a woman is seldom called upon to do anything which she may not do in an agreeable style—if she will only take pains. Now, let your first thought be—never to disarrange, even for an instant, that drapery of pleasantness which a woman should always wear ; keep it on, even for your husbands, dears ; it is practice, if nothing else.”

“ Oh, mamma !” the girls cried out together, joining in a merry peal, which the little woman did not frown upon, knowing that her sermons had better be ludicrous than dull.

“ Yes ; be agreeable even when you are alone with your looking-glass. Never forget the purpose of your life.”

It was a picture for a finer pen than mine. This small, active, quick-witted woman of the world ; these shrewd sentences ; that cool, worldly look, strangely mingled with earnestness ; the raised forefinger which enforced the doctrine ; the puppet-like figure. Then these three graceful, blooming girls, in their pretty morning costumes, one reclining delicately on the sofa, another with finger-tip gracefully set to her lip as she half attended to her Virgil and half to her mother, the third trying to find a carnation in her paint-box as fair as that on her cheek. Such a lecture, such a lecturer, and such pupils never were found together before or since.

“ Sophia,” the little woman called out at last, “ have you been attending ?”

"Yes, mamma," she answered; "and I have been reading Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare!" ejaculated the mother. "Dry, Sophia—very dry."

"Not the love-scene between Ferdinand and Miranda," Sophia replied, holding up the open page.

"Well, a love-scene," the little woman said, modifying her disapproval—"perhaps you might find something useful in *that*. And yet I don't know," she added. "I think, Sophia, if you will pay attention to me I shall teach you how to behave in a love-scene better than Shakespeare could. He was only a man, after all; and I have seen a great deal of love, dear."

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH IS ILLUSTRATED THE TRUTH THAT MATURE YEARS,
A GRAVE POSITION, COMFORT, AND CHEERFULNESS, ALL
UNITED, CANNOT DEFEND THE HEART OF MAN FROM LOVE

OUR little town of Kettlewell had inhabitants to the number of ten thousand, and three churches; but of these latter, two were what at that date were called district churches, and the great ancient parish church was the ecclesiastical centre of the town. Like many another such noble structure, it was but poorly endowed; and the rewards which it offered to its minister were chiefly the contemplation of venerable architecture and a social position of considerable importance. The saying always was that none but a man of fortune could be rector of Kettlewell. Consequently, at each vacancy the bishop was in a difficulty. Rich men he could find; but to find one rich and able, too, was not so easy; and at the last appointment, being unable to meet with a clergyman thus doubly qualified, he had chosen a wealthy parson of rather meagre abilities, who was now our spiritual chief. The Rev. Anthony Brent was a cheerful man, undersized, with a merry nose of ruby, and a countenance denoting neither deep learning nor that isolation of character which is natural in men who live above the world. Indeed, Mr. Brent did not live, nor affect to live, one inch above the level of commonplace cheerful life. He told us from his pulpit that human things are frail and nothing worth,

and that man is full of misery; but having folded up his sermon, he seemed to have folded up his theology too, for when you met him on week days he was full of comfort and good cheer. Perhaps we are fastidious people; perhaps we are ignorant; certain it is that we never could quite satisfy ourselves that Mr. Brent was altogether a gentleman. His manners were no better than a blithe, lissome creature, such as he, might have picked up in ten years between twenty-five and thirty-five. He had a way of alluding to "my gardener" and "my banker" which seemed to show, so Sparking said—Mr. Brent employed the rival practitioner—that some time in his life he had neither bank nor garden. It is very possible that, had he not been so good-natured, his vulgarity might have been obvious, which it never was; for, indeed, we could not be quite sure that he was vulgar at all. Another thing puzzled us: where had his fortune come from? He was very wealthy, and a widower, and our idea was that Mrs. Brent had brought the money. This, too, was guess, and nothing but guess. Such, then, was our rector—a man liked, but not greatly respected, and yet a man whom none could condemn or fairly despise; a shallow man, equal to reading his newspaper, and no more; on good terms with the world, able, without any strain of conscience, to preach saintly sermons, copied out from standard divines, and at the same time live an easy, average life; a comfortable man, with good intentions, sound digestion, a full purse and cellar, and one who never let his kitchen chimney freeze.

It was the reverend widower Brent whom we, upon consideration, had assigned to our lively Mrs. Barbara Temple as third husband; and events went rapidly to show that our forecast was not inexact. Mr. Brent was about fifty;

Mrs. Barbara Temple was well known to be about forty-five ; so that on the score of age there was nothing against the match ; and as to inclination, the rector soon made it evident that there was no obstacle on his side. Everybody remarked that he took the Temples up with remarkable warmth. He gave dainty little lunches and snug little dinners for them ; and he was forever calling in his carriage to take one or other of the girls a drive, the little mother attending as chaperon. At first we were in doubt as to which he was pursuing—mother or daughters ; and we even thought that grave Sophia, with her heavenly face, had attracted him ; but we forgot that he was a man of some common-sense. Mrs. Temple was his choice : her vivacity, her polish, her knowledge of the world, her untiring energy, were all after his own heart. He soon began to drop hints, as men do who have matrimony in their heads. “Mrs. Temple was a remarkably fine woman.” “Forty-five was the exact age that the wife of a man of fifty should be—the exact age.” “Mrs. Temple did not look forty-five” (he admitted that) ; “but”—and he would drop his voice—“he knew she was every day of it.” The intimation was that he had either seen the register of her baptism, or she had told him the fact direct ; and he declared over and over again, with amusing earnestness and publicity, that forty-five was the age he approved of ; that, for a man of his standing, one year younger would be one year too young, and one year older, one year too old. Of course, so far, he had not said that he hoped or wished to marry Mrs. Temple ; but the drift of his conversation and conduct was unmistakable.

In the meantime it was evident that the lively widow did not dislike attentions which had now become so

marked that even those saw them who could see nothing. She exchanged compliments freely with the rector, invited him to her house, praised his sermons, and she was actually found one evening at a missionary meeting over which he presided. She listened to his speech with the utmost attention, sitting erect, and keeping her eyes fixed upon him, although it would have been hard to say whether she knew or cared less about the subject. She could not have told in which continent the district spoken of lay, nor whether the people were white, brown, or black; but she listened as attentively as if she had been hearing of dear relations in a far-off land. In short, with garden-parties and lunches and dinners and drives, things went so far that we all considered the matter settled; and when we heard that no proposals had yet been made, we all agreed that there must be a tacit engagement, which, for some private reasons, was not just yet to be avowed. To all intents and purposes, we regarded Mrs. Temple and Mr. Brent as affianced; and, on the whole, we approved of our rector's choice. Certainly we should have liked a lady more interested in religious affairs; but then, we argued, it was much better than if he had married a young woman. So, balancing matters, we accepted the event with satisfaction.

The rector was in ecstasies. He was in his element, dancing attendance on these four brilliant women; and really a careless observer might have been puzzled to tell which of the four he was pursuing. In the most polished of hats, the newest of suits, the most faultless lavender gloves, and looking all over a comfortable ecclesiastic, he would flit around them, glowing and beaming with satisfaction. The girls, for their part, accepted his civilities with charming freedom; and their mother—shrewd wom-

an—never manifested the smallest jealousy. In this, besides proving her own good sense, she paid her admirer a compliment which he fully deserved; for he looked upon the three girls as daughters already, and was fond of them in the most parental fashion.

"Ah, Mrs. Temple," he said one day, when he was getting hot, as the children say in their hide-and-seek game, "I have but one child—a son, a dear, good fellow, away in Australia. I always longed for daughters."

Whereupon Mrs. Barbara Temple turned full upon him one of her keen looks, which said, "I understand," but a good-humored look all the time; and then she broke into a little bland laugh, and made herself more comfortable in her seat, for they were driving. The rector was just going to propose then and there; but it happened that the carriage, speeding down the dusty road, met the curate, who was footing it home from some remote part of the parish, where he had been visiting a sick old woman. He signalled the carriage to stop, and addressed the rector—

"Old Spearman is dying," he said.

"Poor Hannah Spearman!" the rector replied, shaking his head. "I have known her many years. Poor Hannah Spearman!"

"Polly," the curate remarked—"Polly Spearman."

"Of course it is Polly," the rector rejoined. "In visiting about in a parish like mine"—he turned to Mrs. Temple—"one's head gets so full of Pollies, and Sallies, and Billies that one is apt to take the name that comes first. I am sorry for poor Han—Polly. But what *can* you do in a case of natural decay?"

"It is not natural decay," the curate answered, with a waggish dryness in his manner. "She fell downstairs."

"To be sure, she fell downstairs!" little Mr. Brent cried, reproving his faulty memory by a gesture of his gloved hand. "How came I to confound the two—*complaints?*"

"Perhaps because you are suffering from a third," retorted the curate. He loved a joke, and had before this broken a jest on his own bishop. And our rector was a tempting object, being not apt to take offence, and not one to inspire great respect or fear.

The carriage drove on, but for once little Mr. Brent was downright angry.

"Rather an impertinent speech," he said, glancing diffidently at Mrs. Temple.

"Impertinent!" cried easy-humored Mrs. Temple. "Nothing of the sort."

"Milligan has no sense of propriety."

She gave a little laugh.

"I like Mr. Milligan."

At this Mr. Brent took heart, changed his view of the matter, reddened with pleasure, and gave himself up to laughter, which lasted until the tears were chasing each other down his rosy cheeks. But somehow or other the proposal was not made that day.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE LAST CHAPTER IS
LED FORWARD TO A NEW ISSUE, WHICH SHOWS THAT
VANITY CAN VANQUISH LOVE WHEN LOVE HAS VAN-
QUISHED ALL BESIDES

THE following morning Mr. Brent received a letter from his son in Australia, announcing his intention of returning to England for a few months. The reason of this return the letter went on to furnish. The son said he feared his father would think him very foolish ; but love was bringing him home, and—here was the worst of the matter—love under very peculiar circumstances. He had fallen in love with—a picture ! He had seen the portrait of a girl whose face had impressed him as never the living face of any woman had ; and, having ascertained that the original of the picture really lived, and was English, and not a duchess or a princess, which well she might be, but a girl of his own rank in life, young Brent was determined to find her out, and try to secure her for himself. The letter wound up in very ingenuous language, admitting the apparent absurdity of the whole proceeding, but protesting that the passion was true and deep, and that nothing could end it except realization or absolute and ascertained hopelessness.

Rector Brent was a good-natured man and a kind father ; so he shook his head and smiled over his son's folly, being a sage himself. But he wrote a kind reply,

saying that his son would be always welcome home under any conceivable circumstances, and that though he must confess the expedition seemed rather wild, yet he well knew that, in the latter scenes of the affair, his son would be ruled by his own good sense and his father's counsel.

"And now," the rector said, as he sealed this praiseworthy epistle, "I think, before Percival comes home, I had better have my affairs settled." This he said, and as he spoke he looked at his own likeness in the chimney-glass. Something struck him. "Dear me!" he exclaimed, "I must get some new teeth!" For fifty years of good living had told upon this portion of his mechanism; and now, reflecting that he was about to marry, he reasoned thus: "At such times we refurnish our houses. Think of a man refurnishing his house and not refurnishing his mouth! If I am to have a new dining-table, I ought to have a new set of teeth to use at it. Besides—" He grinned in the glass. "Yes," he said, shaking his head—"not at all prepossessing." He grinned again, and this time, by the power of fancy, set new white teeth in the vacant spaces. "Not a doubt of it," he murmured—"the greatest improvement!"

So that morning, instead of making a proposal of marriage to the lively widow, he went to an adjacent town, where a notable dentist practised; and here he had his jaws overhauled and a plan of the projected improvements drawn out. The dentist was a man of chat, and when he ascertained from whence the parson came, he had all sorts of questions to ask about various people in the neighborhood, and curious stories to tell, and gossip to exchange; so that our little rector, perched in the operating-chair,

laughed and chirruped, and looked the image of enjoyment. Short-sighted man !

"By the way," said the dentist, pausing a moment, with one of his tools in his hand, "has not a Mrs. Temple settled in Kettlewell during the past year?"

Rector Brent knew that a faint blush shot out on his cheek as he answered, "Yes."

"A remarkable woman!" the dentist continued, forgetting his task, while with a meditative face he seemed to contemplate by-gone days. "A very remarkable woman!"

"A very, *very* remarkable woman!" the rector replied, determined to add an adverb in this very peculiar case.

"Wonderful energy!" said the dentist.

"Most wonderful!" the rector rejoined, still on the augmentation principle.

"And such a face and figure!" the operator said again.

"Ah! *such* a face and figure!" repeated the rector, unable to refrain from rubbing his hands together.

"For her years," the dentist remarked, in an explanatory voice.

"Oh, come, come!" cried the rector, in tones of remonstrance. "I don't see that. She is youthful certainly, and sprightly; but still, women are not old at forty-five."

"At *what* five?" asked the dentist, not having caught the first word.

"Forty-five," repeated the rector, boldly and emphatically.

"Seventy-five, more likely," the blunt dentist said, now intent on his tool, which was out of repair.

"Oh, I see, I see!" cried Rector Brent; "you are talking of her mother. We don't know the mother. The mother does not live with them now."

"Unless Mrs. Barbara Temple is herself and her mother at the same time, I am not talking of her mother," the dentist answered. "That lady is seventy years of age, if she is seven."

Saying this with great unconcern, he advanced to take some further measurement of the clergyman's mouth, and observing his face of horror, he said, reassuringly,

"Don't be uneasy ; I am not going to take anything out."

The rector, gasping, waved him away. So convulsive were his movements that for a moment the dentist feared that he might have left one of his minor implements in the patient's mouth, which implement, having been inadvertently swallowed, was, from its unaccommodating material and unusual shape, doing violence to nature in one or other of the canals which traverse the human continent.

"Do you mean to say," said the astounded clergyman, at last, "that Mrs. Barbara Temple—the lady who has three fine daughters—is more than forty-five?"

"Before one of those young ladies was born," the dentist replied, little thinking how dreadful were his words, "I made a front tooth for Mrs. Temple—not Mrs. Temple then. She was a remarkably handsome woman, something over forty, just a tint of gray in her hair. I was not surprised when I heard, a few months after, that young Captain Temple was going to marry her. But I *was* a little surprised when I heard subsequently that his wife was going to present him with a child ; and when I heard that this child was followed by a second, and that by a third, I was, I confess, surprised not a little."

"But Mrs. Temple was only about two-and-twenty when

she married the second time," the rector said, still unable to credit what he heard.

"My dear sir," the dentist said, laughing, "I have known Mrs. Barbara Temple as a woman for five-and-forty years at the least. Let me see"—he went through some half-audible calculation—"I remember her jilting a man in seventeen hundred and ninety-five."

"Then," the rector cried, leaping from the chair, and smiting hand against hand till the room rang, "I shall never believe anything in this world again except the three Creeds and the Ten Commandments. Nothing is to be trusted—not eyes or ears, nor the human reason. Forty-five—seventy-five!—jilted a man in seventeen hundred and ninety-five! Why, then she must remember the French Revolution! Oh dear! oh dear! how very hot it has become!"

The reader who is observant, and a student of his kind, must have remarked that Nature now and then fashions a weakly sort of brain, which a single glass of small beer will bemuddle. In a similar way does that by no means infallible workwoman sometimes turn out a brain which cannot stand the shock of strange or disagreeable tidings. Rector Brent was, for all practical purposes, tipsy that afternoon. The disclosure had got into his head. It is true that his legs did not stagger, but his reason did. He did not know his right hand from his left, and was prepared to commit any blunder. While his mind was in a chaos of ideas that whirled round and about like leaves in an autumnal storm, he said to himself that something must be done. An insane something it was which he fixed upon. He would go straight to Mrs. Temple and tax her with dissimulation. The excited little gentleman never considered that the lady had not made any state-

ment of her age with which she could be confronted. Nor did his preparation of impending absurdity stop here. Fully resolved as he had been to propose to the widow, and assured as he had felt that she both knew his intention and favorably regarded it, he quite forgot in his hurry of mind that he had never addressed her in the way of marriage. So he actually came before her in the posture of a betrayed suitor, and, as will be seen, he used language proper only to that particular part in the human comedy.

But this is leaping from chapter to chapter. As we close this one let us simply mark our parson stepping out of his carriage at Mrs. Barbara Temple's door. His breath is hurried, his face is red, his manner is disordered. And we may be sure that these outward marks of confusion and annoyance convey only a very inadequate picture of the state of his reasoning faculties. These were, indeed, in that state of riot and darkness which in most cases is the acknowledged preliminary to Bedlam.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE REVEREND ANTHONY BRENT GETS AS GREAT A FALL AS THAT WHICH WROUGHT THE FINAL RUIN OF HUMPTY DUMPTY

STICK, gloves, and hat all held in one hand, the other hand already raised for the commencement of his speech, so the perturbed clergyman broke into Mrs. Barbara Temple's drawing-room. He saw what might have calmed his mind. The three girls were standing in a group, admiring a drawing which Sibyl had just been buying, and their mother was deep in a novel. The girls looked up, and, as the merry rector was a favorite in the house, each fair face turned to smiles at sight of him. Such rays ought to have melted the angry man into kindness, but no influence, mild or stern, could have quieted him just then.

"Young ladies," he said abruptly, addressing the graceful three, "my business is with your mother—alone."

This odd intimation, considering the excited manner in which he made it, meant, they thought, one thing only. Lightly they vanished from the room, but even in going they glanced significantly at each other; for the subject was so interesting that they could not delay an exchange of ideas even till they got outside the door. The rector was going to propose to mamma!

Mamma thought so too. She was not often deceived, either by her eyes or her ears, but for once she fancied that the tremor in the rector's voice, his flushed cheek, his

alcoholic manner, were signs of a lover's uneasiness. Indeed, as to the manner, she, without any hesitation, explained it as arising from wine. It was still early in the afternoon, but Mrs. Barbara Temple was not angry. Teetotalism was not yet fashionable, and the little woman remarked to herself, "They very often give themselves a fillip in that way before coming to the point. Pity when they overdo it—and yet I don't know."

The rector might be flustered, but Mrs. Barbara Temple was calm and pleasant. She motioned him to a seat—not upon her own sofa, but close to it; and then, laying down her novel, she turned upon him with her most gracious air.

Automatically (so we say in this scientific age) he sat down, and, still to continue the scientific style, by the action of the law of gravitation, his hat, gloves, and cane, which he let go, went their different ways to the floor. He did not notice the fall, and Mrs. Temple began inly to compute how many glasses he must have taken.

"I hope he has not gone too far," the prudent woman said to herself; and her hope grew less and less as the rector regarded her with his red, confused visage, saying nothing for quite a minute. Then he spoke.

"Mrs. Temple," he said, "I this morning received a tremendous lesson of the hollowness of the world!"

Mrs. Barbara Temple was not greatly skilled in metaphorical language, especially the pulpit sort; but as she knew that her visitor was not the sort of person to make researches into the interior of the physical globe, she had no great difficulty in understanding that he spoke of the human kind under this universal symbol.

"Well, well," she said, shaking her head, "that very often happens. The best thing is to be prepared for it.

Don't expect too much of men and women, and you will learn to be good-humored over their selfishness and hypocrisy. After all, are we much better ourselves? At any rate, let us keep our temper."

She stroked her dress at these words, brushing off some imaginary dust, and, looking up at the clergyman, she smiled.

"That," the clergyman said solemnly, "is a terribly frivolous view to take of so serious a subject." Then, seeing the woman of the world elevate her eyebrows and smile more contemptuously than before, he added, "Especially when the fault is our own."

He looked at her so directly, and with such anger, that she was quite puzzled. This could not be the opening passage of an offer of marriage; and what could it be? Mrs. Temple, however, had faces and manners for all complications.

"Mr. Brent," she said, with just the faintest sign of distance about her, such as could either be effaced or deepened according as the occasion required, "I am afraid you are talking of something which I don't understand."

"Mrs. Temple," cried the over-excited little man, lashed up by his feelings so that he fancied himself a judge and invested with a judge's rights, "how old are you?"

For once in her cool, self-possessed life Mrs. Temple was really dumfounded. She looked at her visitor, but found no word to utter, and he, with an air of the most preposterous indignation and triumph, faced her, shaking his head, pursing his lips, and puffing at her in the most extraordinary style. At last she recovered herself. She was sorry to think it, but the rector must be under the influence of wine.

"Mr. Brent," she said, "I think we had better take a

walk in the garden." She had hoped in this quiet way to lead him to his carriage.

"No!" cried the hot little fellow, "we shall not take a walk in the garden." He sneered horribly as he repeated her words. "You have deceived me, Mrs. Temple, shockingly!"

"Deceived you?" she cried, now with decided sternness in her voice. "I am quite bewildered!"

"Is—it—not—true," continued Mr. Brent, beating time to each word, as if he were counting in a music-lesson, "that—you—jilt—ed—a—gen—tle—man—about—the—time—of—the—French—Revolution?" The astounding form of this question, and possibly some fact in her actual life which it brought to sharp memory, caused Mrs. Temple to change color. But she was really too amazed to make any answer. Mr. Brent was now a kind of drawing-room Red Indian, and in the exact frame of mind in which these children of Nature begin to feel for their tomahawk. "And—did—you—not—lead—me—to—be—lieve—that—you—are—for—ty—five—and—no—more?" he demanded, still hitting his open palm as he emitted each monosyllable.

Amid all her amazement Mrs. Temple could now see in what style she ought to treat the man, and so, rising with admirable composure, she made as if she would at the next word ring the bell.

"Mr. Brent," she said severely, and she said no more. She looked striking—her diminutive, well-knit figure opposite his, which was in a funny posture, suggestive enough of tipsy rhetoric, and her stern, still face looking into his flushed and puffy visage.

"You cannot deny it," he went on, a true illustration of the old saying that whom the gods wish to destroy they

first make mad. He might even yet have saved himself if he would have fairly noted her aspect, but still he believed she trembled before him. "Under that false impression I was actually going to have married you—in fact, I might have married you, and not found out the truth till all was over!"

Mrs. Temple had by this time begun to get an inkling of the whole truth, and now, like the general she was, she prepared to crush the enemy. First she stretched out her hand imperiously, and, signing to a small arm-chair, "Sit down there," she said.

Amazed in his turn, but quailing already, Mr. Brent obeyed. How he got safely seated is a mystery, for he never looked at the chair, nor lifted his eyes from her.

"When you first came into this room," she said, in more imperious tones than before, "I thought you were drunk. The next minute I thought you were mad. It took a little longer to show me that you are neither, but only impertinent."

The little man gazed up at her open-mouthed, like a dying fish. All the strength of his fury was gone.

"How dare you ask me my age?" she now demanded, driving the question into him like a dagger. He, realizing for the first time his own absurdity, made no answer.

"When did I tell you I was forty-five?" she asked, changing to a cold, sarcastic tone. "Tell me."

"Well," he stammered, "I don't exactly know; but everybody said that was your age, and—and I"—he scratched his head, with a pitiable air—"I supposed you must have told them."

"Oh! then it seems it was not I that said 'so'?"

"Oh no! it was not you."

He made this admission eagerly, to show that he was

ready to be civil. She went on, growing colder as he grew more confused.

"You spoke of marrying me; had you ever asked me?"

"No, I had not," he replied, with a dismal expression of consternation. "But I—I—I—fancied—"

"You fancied that you are so engaging that the only question is whether you ask or not. The lady's reply would be like the vote of thanks at your missionary meetings—it would go by acclamation."

He hung his head. It was a new experience in life for poor Mr. Brent to have to sit silently by while the demonstration that he was an ass was quietly and logically worked out.

"Now, Mr. Brent," she said calmly, "let me enlighten you. You are an amusing chatterer, and you have a position in this place. I did not object to know you, and to be on easy terms with you. But as to marrying you, I should not have done it—not if you had knelt at my feet for a year. You are not agreeable to me. I don't think you would be agreeable to many women. You might find some who would marry you for your money. I tell you candidly I don't think you will ever meet a woman, be she twenty-five or forty-five or seventy-five, who would marry you for yourself."

"Mrs. Temple," the miserable man said, now thoroughly abashed, "I feel I have made a great blunder. Had I not better bring this visit to an end?"

"Not unless you wish it," she answered. "We can change the subject—that will be sufficient."

It was the quintessence of contempt, and reduced him to the station of a buzzing fly, which need not be killed if it ceases to make itself disagreeable.

She rang the bell, and until the servant appeared she allowed the clergyman to enjoy his situation in silence.

"Send the young ladies here," she said.

Poor Mr. Brent hung his head low indeed as the girls came back. Suppressed fun and curiosity were in every feature; but, schooled in self-possession by their mother, they were careful to appear as far as possible unconcerned.

"Girls," the little lady said, looking upon them with eyes of fire, "Mr. Brent has been here on a curious mission."

He looked up at her, appealing for mercy, and she returned his look with an expression which he believed denoted that mercy was out of the question.

"He has been interested about an old woman in this parish, of whom he heard much that was favorable. He was going to make her a parish annuitant; but, fortunately, before he committed himself he was told certain facts about her. He learned that she had misconducted herself at the time of—the French Revolution, was it not, Mr. Brent?"

He could not answer. He looked at her, petrified and dumb.

"Mr. Brent has been very cautious," she went on—"he has not told me the name of this old woman. I don't really think, girls, her history—or the business Mr. Brent called about—concerns you at all. But still I thought I would like to ask you if you have heard of any old woman in this parish who is very old, and tries to seem very young, who misconducted herself during the French Revolution?"

"Never heard of her," the wondering girls called out all together. "Don't you know her name?"

"You see, girls," she answered, "Mr. Brent is so very discreet that he never makes a blunder. He can hear everything and say nothing. As I said, it does not concern you, nor me either, only Mr. Brent thought it did. We shall not speak of the matter again. *Now*, Mr. Brent, shall we have our little walk in the garden?"

He rose with them, trying to find a word which might enable him to play the part she assigned him ; but none came. Only, as they descended the flight of steps into the grounds, he managed to whisper in her ear, "*You are the cleverest woman I ever knew.*"

She turned upon him, with a look full of meaning.

"My good man," she whispered back, in accents of the utmost scorn, "don't trouble yourself to say what *I* am. *You are a great fool!*"

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE TALE IS TOLD OF A LADY WHO WON A LOVER
IN AUSTRALIA, WHILE SHE HERSELF NEVER CROSSED A
MILE OF SEA

LITTLE Mr. Brent returned home that day heartily and thoroughly ashamed of himself. His bitterest enemy could not have wished him a more humbling fall. Being a great man for letter-writing, and firmly impressed with the fatal belief that the larger number of human complications can be adjusted by correspondence, he sat down after his dinner to write an explanation and apology to Mrs. Temple. The number of sheets he tore up, the enormous variety of openings which he adopted and cast aside at the fifth line, the sheets beginning "Dear Madam," then "My dear Madam," then "Dear Mrs. Temple," then "My dear Mrs. Temple," falling subsequently into "Mr. Brent ventures to present his respectful compliments," and besides these the "I am overwhelmed with confusion," "It is, I assure you, with the most poignant sensations of sorrow," "What can I say?" "What can I urge in extenuation of my behavior?"—so many of these were begun, cast aside, and torn up very small, lest any one should find out what he had been doing, that as the night wore on the rector gradually began to look like a man who is being snowed up. When at twenty-five minutes past four A.M., after nearly nine hours of unintermitting head-work, the apology was finished, there was not left enough clean sta-

tionery in the house for a washing-bill; but in place of it there were fragments of paper lying on the floor sufficient for the manufacture of six full-sized paper pillows. With aching head, yet a little consoled withal, the rector stumbled upstairs to his weary pillow.

If he used a thousand sheets for his letter, it may be safely computed that one thousand and one was all that was required for the entire correspondence. Small was the paper and few the lines of Mrs. Barbara Temple's answer :

"DEAR MR. BRENT,—thus it ran—"I have received your letter of apology, and I cannot say that it is at all more than the occasion required. At the same time, as you are sensible of the impropriety of your behavior, I hope you will now forget it, as I shall. One stipulation only I make. The subject of marriage—or, indeed, any allusion to what passed between us yesterday must never be made. On these terms you are free to resume your intercourse with my daughters and myself.

Truly yours,

"BARBARA TEMPLE."

"A very handsome letter," Mr. Brent said. "I shall take her at her word;" and after lunch he drove over to the house with a splendid present of fruit and flowers, and being received in the usual friendly way by mother and daughters, and his character being a slight one, not permanently impressible, he half forgot the misery of his exit from the place yesterday. Only when he first spoke to Mrs. Temple there was a trepidation in his voice and manner; but she was so obviously determined to keep her promise that he gradually grew composed. Once only his courage quite failed him. Caroline, the student, was reading history, and with that slight affectation of intellectual pursuits, from which not even her mother's lectures could guard her, she tried to call the rector's attention to her

lofty employment. The question she asked him was an unfortunate one. She was an ardent Liberal, and inquired in a pause in the conversation if he did not think that great good had arisen from the French Revolution. The rector was so confounded by this inapposite interrogation that he nearly tumbled off his chair.

The next day his thoughts were driven into another channel. At breakfast he got a letter from his son, announcing his arrival in London, and saying that he would be in Kettlewell at half-past four that afternoon. Amid the vexation of the last two days this was a prospect full of relief, and the young fellow was received with more than a paternal welcome. Before dinner was over, between the influence of meat and wine and the society of his son, all acting on a trivial nature, easily moved, the rector was quite comforted. Now he could have faced Mrs. Barbara Temple with a jest and a look of pleasantry. At least, so he fancied.

Brent junior was a good-looking young fellow of three-and-twenty, with a frank, simple manner well suited to his years. Mentally he was much superior to his father, and every sentence showed it; but he behaved with a filial deference which was pleasant to see. All through the dinner there was a touch of preoccupation and even sadness about him, and upon this his father remarked as soon as they were alone.

"I hope you have not left any one behind?" the father asked humorously.

"No," the son answered, with a blush and a laugh. "You don't think me quite a simpleton in this matter, do you?"

"Well, Percy, you are young," the sage father replied. "At *my* time of life, if a man fell in love with a picture

I think he would be a bit of an ass. But then I am forty-nine. I have age and experience and knowledge of the world."

"You are very kind to take it in that way," the son answered. "I really don't want to be laughed at."

"Is this wonderful picture in your possession?" Brent senior inquired next.

"Yes," the young fellow answered eagerly; and he was darting upstairs to fetch it, when, pausing on his way, he said, "I had better tell you the story of it first."

He made no bad picture himself, leaning carelessly against the sideboard, his face and eyes kindling, as he spoke, with the delight of the subject. Little Mr. Brent regarded him with evident pride; and the young fellow, with a light bashfulness which made the little narrative the more interesting, told his story.

"I met an artist out there, and he and I became great friends. He fell ill, and I nursed him; and when he was getting better, one day, to pass the time, he asked me to look over his portfolio. There was a great deal in it for which I cared nothing; but just at the end he drew out a little sketch of a girl—head and shoulders—with a border of simple white dress, and, as I thought, the loveliest face I ever saw. I was quite dumb as I looked at it, and there and then, father, I fell in love; and I declare to you I felt that even if this woman were only a painter's ideal, still so had she captivated me that I could never give my heart to any living woman. The memory of this picture would possess me, and would hang, as it were, above the living face, and rebuke its imperfections. You are not laughing?"

"I am forty-nine, Percy," the father said, with the calmness of wisdom. "You are twenty-four."

"Well, I shall not trouble you with a long story," the young fellow continued. "Luckily for me, my friend was lying on a couch, and did not perceive my agitation, or he might have laughed me out of the dream. I found the sketch represented a real living girl—a real living girl, father!—unmarried, English, and, best of all, living not far from here. I asked for the picture, which he gave me readily. Curiously enough, he did not seem to see in it the superlative beauty which I saw. Oh, how I hung over that picture! How I idolized it! It was near me night and day, and at every glance my love for the original increased. Father, that is the woman I shall marry, if I ever marry at all!"

"You must see what her character is, Percy," the father said. "And we must make a few inquiries about family—and property."

"Her origin must be refined!" the lover cried. "Her character could be nothing but the noblest! As for property—property!—give me that girl, and I shall work hard enough to earn a world!"

So saying, he ran upstairs; and in a moment returned, bearing the precious picture wrapped up in folds of silver paper. With trembling haste, but with more than womanly care, he put back one smooth sheet after another until the cardboard lay on the table, face down; then, drawing a long breath, he turned the picture up before his father.

"There," he murmured, "let her plead her own cause."

At the same instant his father uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Percy," he said, "this girl is a friend of mine!"

"A friend!" the lover cried rapturously.

"An old friend," the rector answered. "Her mother is—ahem!—an old friend of mine—a very old friend, I may say. We are quite on intimate terms. The name of this young lady is Miss Sophia Temple."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE HERO AND HEROINE OF THIS LITTLE NOVEL ARE BROUGHT FACE TO FACE

AND so it was. Young Brent had fallen in love with the daughter of the woman who had just rejected his father so angrily. Mr. Brent thought at first that this alone would make an end of the thing; Mrs. Barbara Temple would not give her consent—so reasoned this parson, who knew the world so well. He kept silence on the point, however, and soon his son's ardor, carrying everything before it, made his small doubts and scruples of no effect at all.

"This picture is good—very good," the father said, gazing at it; "but I must tell you that it does not do the girl justice. Where it fails I cannot say; indeed, I can scarcely say what it is that makes Sophia Temple so handsome."

Of course the son listened to all this with greedy ears; and the conversation turned into a discussion of the prospects of the affair, which for the present the father would not admit to be hopeful, still remembering his own late repulse. When, however, young Brent ascertained that his father was on visiting terms with the family, he would hear no more of doubt or difficulty. With such an opening the fault must be his if he did not make the girl his own.

"You are sure she is not engaged?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, quite sure," the rector answered. "None of the girls are engaged; indeed, the only one of the family who has been talked about in that respect is the—"

Mr. Brent stopped, and turned as red as a turkey-cock. He never did guard his lips well, and this disclosure came out before he remembered how awkward the subject might be. So he repeated the sentence stammeringly.

"The only one of the family that was talked about in that respect was—"

"You don't mean her mother?" cried the young fellow. He was quite interested in his beauty's mother, and was ready to be interested in her grandmother if necessary.

"Yes, the mother was talked about," the rector said, still red with self-consciousness; "but there was nothing in it, Percy—nothing."

"Is her mother handsome?" asked our lover vivaciously.

"Decidedly handsome," the father replied.

"About what age?"

"Her age, Percy," the rector replied gloomily, "has not been ascertained."

Young Brent was a man of scientific tastes, and it was to his credit that, born as he was to great expectations, he steadfastly pursued his studies, in which he was now no contemptible authority. Geology was his favorite, and he was resolved to devote his energies to that science, for he was old-fashioned enough to believe that birth to good fortune imposes obligations on the inheritor. Young Brent resolved to make his mark in the world. Like all young enthusiasts, he must be forever talking over his subjects, and he would try to interest his father in geology; but Brent senior had no patience with the insatiable demands of that science for time. "In the

name of goodness," he would say, "is not six thousand years enough for you? Just think what could be done in six thousand years! Up to that time you can do as you please, but I do object to your upsetting everything on the plea of wanting to account for a dead fish being found in one of your strata. Is it any great matter how it came there, or when? To be upsetting Bishop Usher, simply because somebody has found a few bones in a rock where he did not expect, seems to me the most monstrous thing I ever heard of."

For all that, when the easy-humored rector heard his son praised in company for his scientific attainments, he was not ill-pleased; and contrasting his earnest and energetic youth with the idleness and frivolity of other young fellows in the town, he was willing to excuse the mild scepticism which contented itself with requiring a little chronological elasticity from Bishop Usher. Indeed, the rector might fairly be proud of his son; intellectual ardor is seldom exclusive, and the young man's love of science gave him sympathy with much besides which was not directly scientific. He took an interest in politics, but with Radical symptoms, which his father pounced upon with vigilance and great heat, ending the dispute generally with a laugh and the hope that things would last his time. Besides this, young Brent was a good musician, and not without literary tastes, for he dabbled in poetry. But partly through studious shyness, and more from a certain physical awkwardness, he was not altogether a drawing-room man. He had too great respect for women to be altogether a favorite with them; for these exalted beings, knowing their celestial qualities, cannot see why they should be approached with downcast eyes or addressed with faltering lips. So young Brent was not a

lady's man nor a company man, although there were stories of at least two pretty girls having been in love with him ; and as to company, whenever the talk grew serious, Brent, as by natural right, began to speak freely, and spoke often with great success.

It was impossible to withstand the lover's entreaties ; and so little Mr. Brent, divided between uneasiness and satisfaction, fearing a repulse, and yet not without hope of now wholly regaining his footing in the widow's lively house, introduced his son to the ladies. All four were in the drawing-room when the gentlemen were announced, and young Brent was sufficiently master of himself not to betray any preference for one daughter before another. Indeed, he rather avoided Sophia, talked more and more freely with Caroline and Sibyl ; and so few and shy were the glances he cast at her he worshipped that four pairs of female eyes did not, in a quarter of an hour, detect him as lover. Caroline rather liked his conversation, which was a trifle bookish ; but Sibyl pronounced him awkward and bashful. Sophia said nothing, from which one might have fancied that she thought the more ; but it is certain that, as yet, she had not recognized a lover.

Young Brent left the house enchanted. He was ready to say, like the dazzled queen of the East, that the half had not been told him. Sophia Temple did, indeed, look very lovely that morning ; and as her face was in a most particular sense a face of expression, no portrait could do her justice. The young lover flew off in an ecstasy of praise. Was ever a true picture of womanhood seen before ? Was not Sophia the living presentation of that image of sense and sensibility which hovers around every man's fancy as the likeness of the true woman, but which seldom takes form and feature—once or twice in a genera-

tion perhaps? I pardon the lad's raptures. And in her face that afternoon there was a delightful harmony of expression, sweetness, and seriousness, animation with a suspicion of humor, and a sort of tender sadness predominating over all the rest. Is not the highest beauty always touched with sadness?

The worldly mother, who never lost a chance of instructing her daughters, and eliciting their opinions for correction, asked them what they thought of their new acquaintance.

"Dull," replied Sibyl, finishing him off with one word imperially delivered.

"What do you say, Caroline?"

"Oh, not dull, certainly," answers Miss Bookworm; "we talked about astronomy."

"Don't mistake the drawing-room for the library, Car," remarked her mother briskly. "Learned talk is very affected. Be as well educated as you please, but don't seem so. Now, Sophia, what did you think of young Mr. Brent?"

"I hardly formed an opinion, mamma."

"You should have done so, Sophia. Never be listless. And now, girls, shall I tell you my opinion?"

"Do, mamma!" the three exclaimed. For mamma was always racy and pungent and instructive, especially in her professorial moods.

"He is a little sheepish, and he wants not only confidence, but manner as well. A few remarks from some observing lady friend, such as—"

"Yourself, mamma," Car cried.

"Well, dear, let us say myself, then. It would do him a world of good. He is a diligent young fellow, and would soon improve if he could be got to give his mind to

it. Those quiet, retiring young men have often a great deal in them ; and remember, girls, that if they do not shine at the times or in the ways in which ordinary men of the world do, still they are sometimes brilliant and effective where men of mere manner and accomplishments quite fail. Don't be prejudiced, even by sheepishness, Sibyl ; all is not homeliness that seems so. And Caroline, my love, *do* give up that bad habit of trying to talk what you call sense ; you have plenty of attractions without that. And, Sophia, when shall I teach you not to be listless ? *appear* so if you please, for I admit that it gives you a charming look at times ; but still, have your wits about you. I assure you, dear, at your age, if a young fellow had been ten minutes in the room I could have told you everything about him, down to the color of his eye-lashes, and no one ever called me a starrer. It was observation, dear, nothing more. Now do observe. Girls," she said, in conclusion, with an air of earnest appeal, "when shall I make you women of the world ?"

Vigilant, energetic, good-humored, there she stood with her delicate daughters around her, training them for society and conquest and applause, with as much patience and enthusiasm as though she had been a religious superior making pupils ready for an eternal state. But shrewd little Mrs. Temple well knew how fleeting her world was.

"What a pity it lasts so short a time !" she would often say. "But that is not our doing. Let us make the most of it while we can."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE MATRIMONIAL FISHING-ROD IS SHOWN TO
HAVE (AT TIMES) A PRETTY WOMAN AT ONE END AND A
GREAT FOOL AT THE OTHER

FATE decreed that just at this time Caroline and Sibyl should each get a lover. An elderly couple of good family and fortune, Doolittle by name, lived in the neighborhood ; and these having but one child, a son, who would inherit a large estate, decided to give him a profession, that he might escape the dangers of an unemployed youth. He was sent into the army, and was at present upon leave.

Egerton Doolittle was a tall young man, slim, with light hair and a lisping speech. His attractions, if he had any, were neither of body nor of mind ; for as to the body, he was feeble in gait, with long legs of inadequate thickness, and he was destitute of eyebrows. The utmost assiduity also failed to bring out a moustache, although he used capillary fluids of appalling strength, rightly judging that, for a man with a military career before him, a certain amount of hair on the face is as essential as uniform or a sword. His mind was of a similar pattern—weak, reclining, and inane ; in a word, he had drawn the line between sanity and imbecility with a most baffling nicety. He walked with his head a little on one side, dressed in the top of the fashion, wore as many different suits as there are hours in the day, lost money mildly at cards, and came to church regularly every Sunday morning, saying his

prayers out of a book the size of a sixpence. He had a creditable desire to read only such publications as were likely to improve his mind, and he always inquired if a work was erroneous or not, saying that he was afraid lest he might be led into the perusal of something erroneous, and might never find it out. He admired women and adored cleverness, frankly confessing that he had none of his own, and thought it "such a useful thing, you know." Indeed, he might have sat for the immortal Mr. Toots, with whom he had so much in common that I fear readers may think Egerton Doolittle only a study of that great prince of noodles. But Egerton is a man by himself, in spite of a resemblance which fairly suggests that he is no more than a reflection.

He met Car Temple at a ball and danced with her, and the young lady, true to herself, inquired in one of the pauses of the dance if he had read Alison's "History of Europe." Doolittle, whose weakness was not historical study, was able, with tolerable readiness, to assure her that he had not. He then sank into silence, that this part of the conversation might settle into his mind. Presently he inquired,

"Is that work you spoke of just now a very big work?"

"Very big," she answered.

"More than one volume?" he asked, resolved not to let the talk flag.

"One volume!" replied Caroline. "A dozen, I dare say."

"A dozen!" exclaimed Doolittle. He was so overwhelmed by this statement that he did not alter a muscle of his face nor emit a syllable for full five minutes. Then he began again,

"You haven't read it, have you?"

"Oh dear, yes," Caroline replied, with the confidence of a practised student.

"The whole dozen volumes?" inquired Doolittle, who could scarcely believe his ears.

"The whole dozen volumes!" Caroline answered, repeating his words with a not ungraceful playfulness.

"Then you must be a tremendously clever girl," he said, gazing at her with profound admiration and awe.

"Clever, because I have read twelve volumes!" cried Caroline, who had a sprightly wit. "I shall read twelve hundred, and see what you say then."

"No," Egerton said gravely, "you will not read twelve hundred volumes, I am sure."

Egerton meditated for another few minutes. Then he asked,

"Is it an erroneous work?"

"Thoroughly," Car replied, with decision. She was a Radical.

"Don't you think it dangerous to read erroneous works?"

"Don't know," Car answered. "Not very." She tossed her head, with a mixture of laughter and slight scorn.

"If I were to read twelve volumes of an erroneous work I should be quite upset," Egerton said, as if he were talking of lobster salad—"upset for weeks. But you are tremendously strong, and you know it—in mind, I mean."

Caroline was not displeased with Doolittle's frank admiration of her powers, nor did she despise it, though its silliness she plainly saw. Something told her he would one day be a lover, and she did not turn from the prospect with aversion. Doolittle was rich, but I do not mean to say that his riches alone made him tolerable in her eyes.

She is not the first clever girl who has liked a man—as *husband*—because he was weak-minded. Car Temple, fond of clever men, preferred in the matrimonial relation a fool ; but her actual or possible reasons for this preference must be discovered by more penetrating dissectors of human nature than myself.

Doolittle astonished his parents mightily when he informed them, with unusual bluntness and energy, that he had fallen in love. Astonishment with the old people quickly ran on into fear, for in a brain so weak as his what might not love accomplish? They trembled lest they should hear him say that some pretty milliner or shop-girl had conquered him, for he affected little flirtations of that sort. When, therefore, the young simpleton gave the name of Car Temple, his parents could not altogether conceal their feelings of relief. It is true their acquaintance with the Temples was the slightest in the world ; but still, she was a lady, and they accepted her as daughter-in-law in prospective without any hesitation. Equipped with this permission, Doolittle flew off down street, not intending to call on his beloved, or, indeed, to do anything in particular, when, as the fates would have it, he stumbled into his love-making in this fashion. Who should he see swinging gracefully up the drowsy street but Car herself—tall, elegant, and altogether bewitching. Doolittle's heart flew into his mouth. He slackened speed, lest he should come upon her before he had braced his nerves for the meeting ; and, while he loitered, Car turned into a haberdasher's shop. He now drew near cautiously, and soon spied her seated at the counter, trying on gloves. Doolittle, never a wholly responsible being, was so fluttered that his behavior for the next few seconds must have had something mechanical in it. He stole into the

shop, and Car was surprised to hear a chair softly drawn across the floor towards her; and before she could look up it was placed at her side; and then she saw Doolittle sinking into it, his eyes fixed on her face all the time, as if he had been magnetized. Car felt the absurdity of the situation; but, with a readiness which her mother would have praised, she resolved not to let the shop-people see anything to laugh at. So she gave Doolittle a lively little nod, as if his conduct were the most natural in the world; and, holding up a pair of gloves, she asked her admirer if they were not a pretty color.

"Capital gloves, I should say," he replied. "Do let me pay for them!"

"Pay for my gloves!" cried Car, breaking now into a hearty laugh at his absurdity.

"Oh! do let me pay for them," he went on pleadingly. "The girl in this shop is such a nice girl—such a tremendously nice girl. I often buy gloves of her, she is so nice. Do let me pay for your gloves."

"We never pay here," Car replied, happy in her excuse. "Everything goes down in mamma's bill."

"I am sorry for that," the lover answered. "I should have liked to pay for your gloves—Oh! how are you? Are you very well?" he asked, addressing the shop-girl, who had returned by this time.

She blushed at his salutation till she was like one of the beauties on her own glove-boxes.

Whether keen-witted Car did not quite approve of this sort of encounter under her very eyes, or whether she was already suited, I cannot tell; but she remarked that she had got all she wanted, and left the shop, not forbidding her admirer to follow her. Follow her he did, though in departing he manœuvred to get right behind her back, that

he might freely bow his adieux to the nymph at the counter, which done, he stepped into the street with a face of great satisfaction, and walked at Miss Temple's side. For many steps he said nothing ; at last he looked up.

"Did you say a dozen?"

"A dozen what?" Car asked. She had forgotten the conversation which had taken place a fortnight before.

"That there were a dozen volumes in that work you read?" he replied.

Car burst out laughing again.

"I am not quite sure of the number," she said—"a great many."

"Not a dozen—only a great many," he said, disappointed ; and then, brightening at his own thought, he added, "Big volumes?"

"Pretty big," answered Car.

"Because," he went on, with a vastly wise look, "if the big volumes are twice as big as little volumes, then twelve would be twenty-four—would they not, Miss Temple?"

"I suppose so," she answered, a little impatient.

"Anybody that reads twenty-four volumes must be tremendously clever," Doolittle said, bringing out this conclusion with a triumphant air. "I said you were tremendously clever ; I know you are."

After this came a pause, Doolittle walking reflectively at her side, and Car shaking with laughter, which, by biting her lips, she managed to hide. Then he took courage.

"Miss Temple, I want to marry a tremendously clever girl. I am not clever myself ; I am very well, but not tremendously clever. Now, I want to marry a girl that can advise me, and tell me what to talk about, and make up things for me to say—smart things, you know, that will

look like my own. And I want a girl that will read works for me, and tell me if a work is erroneous ; for I don't like to read erroneous works, Miss Temple. Now, do marry me, Miss Temple ; for you are exactly that sort of girl, and you will take care of me—I mean I will take care of you. At least, I want you to marry me if you don't very much object ; I do, indeed, Miss Temple."

It is a critical moment in a woman's life when she is asked if she will marry a man whom she does not altogether dislike, and no doubt Car felt something of the gravity of her position. But she felt its absurdity too, and nothing could restrain her laughter. Doolittle seemed much discomfited.

"Don't laugh," he said dolefully. "People always are laughing at me ; and it is tremendously trying, you know."

"I was not laughing at you," Car replied, relieved now that the outburst was over. "I was only thinking how vexed mamma will be with you for speaking to me in this sudden way."

"Vexed, will she ?" said Doolittle, with an air of trepidation, for they were close to the gate of The Beeches. "Perhaps I had better run home. Just advise me, for I feel tremendously nervous."

"No, mamma won't be angry," Car answered reassuringly. "She is walking in the garden. Come in and see her."

Doolittle became confident again at these words, trusting in Car's superior knowledge ; and into the garden they went, where was a great parasol moving to and fro, and under its canopy there promenaded the stately little figure of Mrs. Barbara Temple.

"There is mamma," Car cried, whether in jest or earnest he could not tell, and, darting away, she left him with her mother.

Now Mrs. Barbara Temple, watching the couple from beneath her parasol, had discerned in the twinkling of an eye how matters stood; and knowing the young man, and perceiving his confusion, which returned when Car vanished, the little queen of women came forward, with an air that would have reassured a greater dunce than Doolittle.

"You have been attending on my daughter," she said, with her pleasantest smile. "Most kind of you."

"Oh! you think it really was kind, do you?" cried Doolittle, set on his feet at once. "I am glad of that. I meant it kindly. I wanted to pay for her gloves; but she would not let me, as you have a bill at the shop. It is a very nice shop, Mrs. Temple, and Miss Johnson is a capital girl."

"And who is Miss Johnson?" asked Mrs. Temple blandly.

"Oh! Miss Johnson is the girl that sells the gloves," he answered. "Perhaps I should not mention it to you"—here he giggled indescribably—"but she is a tremendously nice girl, and I have told her so several times."

"Really, Mr. Doolittle," she answered, with an air of reproof something similar to a blow with a feather, "you should not talk in that way to young people."

"Oh! you know, Mrs. Temple," he replied, with sudden sobriety, "I never mean any harm in what I say. In fact, I very seldom mean anything at all. But I never mean any harm—never."

For a few seconds they promenaded side by side, and Mrs. Temple thought it best to let him begin the next bout. He racked his brain for something to say.

"Can I carry your umbrella for you?" he asked at last.

"No, thank you," she replied gayly. "It is not heavy."

"I should have thought it was heavy," he replied. "I

am rather sorry it is not heavy. I should have liked to carry your umbrella for you."

Pause and promenade again.

"Mrs. Temple"—he cleared his throat desperately, and she knew what was to come.

"Yes."

"Your daughter—the one I wanted to buy the gloves for—is a tremendously clever girl."

"People are generally pleased with her," remarked the mother.

"Tremendously pleased, I should think. Do you know, Mrs. Temple, I should like to marry your daughter if you did not mind. I should be particular about your not minding."

Wise Mrs. Temple accepted and treated his proposal as if it had been couched in the most formal style.

"Such a desire is always complimentary," she remarked.

"May I ask if your parents know of this attachment?"

"Oh! certainly; yes, this morning," he replied.

"Do they approve of it?"

"Oh! quite. In fact, my father said he was surprised at my showing so much sense; that he never would have expected it of me. Oh yes, they are quite pleased, I assure you, Mrs. Temple."

"In that case," the managing woman said blandly, "I shall leave the matter in my daughter's hands. I have no objection, Mr. Doolittle; indeed, that is not saying enough—I am pleased."

And in this way, clever, bookish, lively Car Temple was matrimonially engaged to one who might fairly be described as the silliest young man in all England.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH ANOTHER VIEW OF THE MATRIMONIAL FISHING-ROD IS GIVEN, STILL SHOWING A PRETTY WOMAN AT ONE END, BUT NO FOOL AT THE OTHER

THE next to follow—and the succession was rapid—was the beauty Sibyl. Sibyl's engagement was quite as singular as Car's, and in neither case did these really beautiful and spirited young ladies marry equals. Fortune and rank were even enough, but in all beside there was the most unexpected and unreasonable disparity.

There lived a quarter of a mile down the road from The Beeches a wealthy bachelor named Goldmore—a man of fifty years or thereabout, tall, pompous, and imposing to look at—a man of great solemnity, who never laughed except in a responsible sort of way, and who kept his coat well buttoned round his ample frame, typifying, it may be, the reserve with which he wrapped his personality from view. He was the sort of man who, in a picture-book, would look the very image of a respectable Great Briton. There was an air of steady solvency about him—a balance-at-my-banker's air—which was very telling. The most timid shop-keeper would have given Goldmore credit for a thousand pounds before even hearing his name. His mien would have carried him. With his majesty, the bigness of his frame, his vast, bony features, and the sober color of his attire, he looked rather like an elephant who had cast his trunk,

and was going round the world on a tour of solemn survey in a coat and trousers.

Archibald Goldmore, Esq., had a nephew—his heir—who used to come and see him often, and who, being on the lookout for a wife, was struck with the beauty of Sibyl Temple. This Harry Goldmore was a lively young fellow, but no great favorite with his uncle. He was heir, because there was none other forthcoming, but nephew and uncle never quite hit it off. The young man was one of those fortunate or unfortunate people—very much either they are sure to be—who, without being exactly selfish, have yet an inordinate idea of their own claims upon life and their fellow-creatures, with a proportionate disregard of other people's feelings. Young Goldmore would always help himself to the best, even before his uncle's eyes, and would never say, "Uncle, won't you try this?" or, "Let me recommend you so and so"—trifling attentions; but by such little acts young men sometimes make their fortunes. The nephew, too, well knowing that his uncle employed an unsurpassable cook and prided himself upon his table, would yet in the most flippant style find fault with dishes, and declare that in his club in London the cooking was fifty times better.

"Outrageous sauce this!" he exclaimed one evening, as he tasted his boiled mutton; "enough to put one off one's feed."

"At your age," remarked his uncle solemnly, "I got very little sauce at all."

"*Gave* enough, I dare say!" retorted the witty young man, with a great, roaring laugh; after which he finished his mutton and asked for another help, administering the condemned sauce plentifully.

From these few hints every reader of observation can

fill up a sketch of this young fellow's character, and it need only be said that he was tolerably good-looking, by no means vicious, and with very passable manners, becoming almost agreeable on the rare occasions when, standing in awe of somebody, he had the sense to curb his frolicsome disposition.

He saw Sibyl Temple. Used as he was to believe the finest horses bred for him, the finest vintages grown for him, the richest dishes cooked for him, he, hearing and seeing that Sibyl was the handsomest girl in Kettlewell, easily concluded that she had been reared for him. So he began making eyes at her, and having perceived that she noticed his attentions—which she could not fail to do—he treated the conquest as made, and told his uncle on Sunday at lunch that he loved Miss Sibyl Temple, and that he had little doubt that she reciprocated the passion.

Beneath some of our big, middle-aged waistcoats there lie strange secrets. This ponderous Archibald Goldmore—elevated, pompous, and remote from sentiment as he appeared—had a buried sorrow of his own. Years ago his only brother—Harry Goldmore's father—died. The two brothers had ever been fondly attached. Life's early struggle they had faced side by side, and an affection never to be destroyed had, during those early years, laced their hearts together. The brother died. In dying he put his thin, white hand out from under the bedclothes, and, catching Archibald's wrist, begged him not to forget his little son, soon to be an orphan. Archibald promised, and that promise, never broken, and reinforced year after year by memories of the dead man, made the uncle merciful to the rudeness and to the folly of this rash and uncongenial youth. When the young man spoke of marriage, in some inexplicable way a reminiscence of long ago stole into the uncle's heart, and made him sad and gentle.

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"Harry," he said, with unusual kindness, "you are young to marry, and have little of your own, but I approve of the idea on the whole. I shall make your way plain."

"Oh ! that of course," replied the easy youth. "I settled that in my mind long ago," and he laughed loudly.

"Suppose we make a call on the Temples to-morrow," the uncle said.

"No, not to-morrow, thank'ee," the passionate lover said, shaking his head. "To-morrow I ride over to Blancourt to see Jefferson. Never hurry after the women. They think quite enough of themselves without our help," which delicate speech he enlivened with a fresh laugh—loud, hearty, and vacant.

The matter dropped. But at dinner that day, after the cloth had been removed, Archibald Goldmore, gravely renewing the subject, said,

"In a curious way your choice of Miss Temple—we say nothing about her view of the matter—"

"Oh ! that's all right enough," young Harry said.

"That we shall see," his uncle remarked ; "for the present, never mind. I was going to say, your choice in a curious way approves itself to me ; for, do you know, Harry, I once had thoughts of proposing to the young lady myself."

"Of *what*?" screamed the nephew.

"Of proposing to the young lady myself," the uncle repeated.

"Of *WHAT*?" exclaimed the nephew again, in a scream of undoubted surprise. He could neither believe his ears nor disbelieve them.

"Of proposing to the young lady myself," Archibald Goldmore answered once more, with steady solemnity.

His nephew would hear no more. He burst into a roar of laughter, threw himself back in his chair, laughed loud and long, changed the key of his laugh, went high, went low, slapped the table, and in a general way signified that the most comical idea ever heard of since ideas first began had just been let loose upon the world.

"It is perfectly true," the uncle said, used to his nephew's mad moods, and not as yet affronted.

"At your age!" screamed the nephew, "marry a lovely girl like that! Do you think she would have looked at you?" And so in a variety of phrases he put the absurdity, saluting each fancy with a fresh outburst of ridicule; while the uncle sat fuming over insults which were truly exasperating. But he was a man of great self-restraint, and he said nothing.

All that night the nephew persisted in his ridicule. "Uncle, what kind of a coat would you be married in?" "Where would you have gone for your honeymoon?" "How many bridesmaids would you have had?" "Would it not have been suitable to have sage spinsters of fifty?" And so on, in an insane, but offensive, succession. The rude young fellow thought only of his sallies and his amusement; perhaps a little tincture of annoyance lay at the bottom, and made his jests taunts indeed. In any case he jested to his heart's content; and the uncle, boiling with anger, disclosed nothing of his fury.

The nephew thought of a final witticism. After they had gone to bed he marched to his uncle's door and tapped; and the uncle, hearing his voice, which, for wittier effect, he pitched low and serious, fancied he was going to apologize. The great man opened his door.

"Uncle," said the nephew, in a grave tone, which carried on the illusion.

"Well, Henry?"

"Something has just struck me."

"Well, Henry?"

"I could not go to bed without asking you."

"What is it?"

"Make me godfather to number one."

He dropped his voice lower than ever. And, screaming again with rapture, he retreated down the corridor, and left his uncle to go to bed with what appetite for sleep he might.

The next day he rode over to Blancourt, and at night returned to dinner. He was tired, and spoke little beyond a grumble at the fish. But when dessert began, feeling his energies recruited, he thought it time to show something more of his playful ways.

"Thought again about your marriage, uncle?"

"Yes, Henry."

"You could not do a wiser thing than propose to a young beauty," said this young man of fatal rudeness. "The younger and the more beautiful, the wiser you will be."

Here came the facetious scream. It was always the same—short, shrill, spasmodic, irrational.

"So I think, Henry."

"Only don't propose to Miss Sibyl Temple; she's mine, you know."

"Have you asked her?"

"No, but I shall to-morrow."

"Henry, I asked her to-day."

"What, for me?"

"No, for myself."

"You did?"

"I did."

"Now don't begin with any tricks, uncle," the young man said, rising from his chair, with alarm in his face. "I hate practical jokes."

"This is no joke," the uncle answered, with calmness; "I asked Miss Sibyl Temple to-day to marry me, and she said 'Yes.' She is my affianced wife, and with her mother's full consent."

Poor Harry Goldmore's face fell as visibly during this announcement as if it had been a house tumbling down story by story. At the end—the speech was slowly delivered by his uncle—he called out, in exactly the note in which an angry boy says "I won't play any more," "Well, it's the shabbiest thing I ever heard of."

"Henry, listen to me," the uncle said severely. "You are a thoughtless young man, and you know well your affections were not engaged; I doubt, indeed, if you have any affections to engage. You have been rude, and even brutal, in your language to me; I forgive you; you have had a lesson. I would have provided for your marriage with Miss Temple, and still I will provide for it with any young lady I approve of. I am going to my library now, and you had better think this matter over, and ask yourself whether you would not be wise if you learned good manners. I am not harsh with you, and as long as you are not immoral I never will be harsh, for your father's sake. But I shall marry Miss Sibyl Temple, and you shall not."

He rose and left the room, majestic, like the Tower of Babel walking off with itself; and the young man, petrified, followed him with his eyes as he departed, and then sank speechless into a chair.

And thus, reader, was the second, the beautiful Miss Temple, engaged to be married.

CHAPTER XI.

TO BE READ CAREFULLY, FOR IT IS LITTLE LESS THAN A
HAND-BOOK FOR LOVERS, WITH FULL INSTRUCTIONS AS
TO WHEN AND HOW

THE course of true love, if it never runs smooth, very often runs slowly. No one can say that Car or Sibyl Temple married for love; we need not assert that they sold themselves; marriages such as theirs are made every day, with the sanction of the Church and the praise of the world; but they are not ideal marriages—not romantic—not the stuff out of which love-stories can be made. Sweet Sophia Temple, the beauty and heroine of this tale, was not proposed to so abruptly, nor married so hastily.

Young Brent was shy. To increase his shyness, he was passionately in love, and love made a thousand things delights to him which a well-informed modern man might do for his lady once, but not twice certainly. For instance, young Brent would stroll about the town half a morning, waiting for a chance meeting; and if, after he had executed a perfect walking-match in slow time, he met Sophia, and she gave him a smile or exchanged a few words, he would return home all aglow, and could hardly sit down to his geology, so hot his flame would burn. Week after week this went on. Silly young fellow! when he might have been bathing in the full tide of courtship, to be thus timidly treading the margin of the golden sea! Yet,

perhaps, not so silly after all, since most people agree that love's preludes are so delicious that they may well be lengthened; and some say that the water is pellucid near the shore, and turbid when we venture further out.

This I will say in defence of him. Sophia, more than most women, was fitted for this slow, worshipping kind of courtship. It often struck me that she was already what one might imagine a good, warm-hearted, and beautiful woman becoming in a more exalted state of existence. She had the gold of our nature, with very little of its dross. From her, more than from any woman I ever knew, or man either, did I learn how comely human nature may be when harmoniously developed; how various qualities of mind and soul, which we are apt to think conflicting, such as humor and devotion, passion and purity, may, when combined in proper proportions, be each the complement of the other. Sophia changed from mood to mood with an ease, an absence of constraint, which was the sign of a nature reconciled to life in the best sense. I am going to mention a trivial occurrence, but to me it was significant. I saw her one morning greatly interested in an account of a wedding-robe—its color, trimmings, and the usual sequels—just as seriously interested as the most dressy of her sex could have been. A little while after, when a piece of poetry was read aloud by somebody in the company—one of Tom Hood's, I think, just published, a little fragment written in that note of mingled humor and sadness which was so much his own—I saw Sophia's face, with a ripple of fun on it, passing with the poem into seriousness. It seemed as if the soul of the poet, in its double mood of laughter and tears, was expressing itself in her lovely features. It is a small matter to mention—laughable, perhaps—but it impressed me, and it was,

indeed, a disclosure of her character. She had a frank, spontaneous sympathy with life all round and in every part, such as I never met in any one beside herself. By reason of this virtue she was always interested in what was going on, and the very quality which subdued her individuality in one way made her character fresh and delightful in another. Sophia charmed by her constellation of charms, the grouping of virtues and graces of body and mind, which seemed to make her sympathetic with the most opposite persons and at home in the most various scenes.

Was there a key to all this? or was she simply a Phoenix in muslin, a paragon, admirable and inexplicable? It is my conviction that her mother's constant lectures on the subject of women making themselves fascinating—lectures which fell on ears that interpreted every word into a new and higher language than the original—gave that bent to her disposition which made her what she was. The little morning-room disquisitions, with ballrooms and lawns and dinner-tables for texts, concerning dresses and marriages, and carriages and fortunes, and smiles and postures, and witty answers and complaisancy—all these Sophia carried up to a higher level of idea and aspiration. She resolved to charm others, with happiness and goodness in view, not mere society conquests. Mrs. Barbara Temple's prelections were delivered in the spirit of Lord Chesterfield, low and selfish, under a thin disguise of good-humor. Sophia, by the instinct of a lofty nature, resolved to use the means her mother recommended, but with a different end in view. And here was the pleasing originality of her life: she used worldly methods for most unworldly ends. The polish, the graces, the social attractions, the accomplishments, literature and wit, which saints either despise or at best

only tolerate, she used as the very material out of which her noble purpose must be woven. And so she remained rather worldly than otherwise on the face of her life, and serious people declared she needed conversion. But in the secret interior of her intentions she was truly devoted, trying, by the spell of a beautiful womanhood, to make those with whom she lived better and happier. Certain wise men explain the miracle of Pentecost as having lain in the ears that heard, not in the tongues that spoke; the listeners clothing the speech with a sense of their own. So worldly, good-humored Mrs. Barbara Temple said her shrewd say; but the words, as they pattered from her lips, caught from the daughter's finer ear a music and a meaning which the speaker never understood.

With slow delight, with many a blush, with stolen glances, and a few shy words, the courtship of Percival and Sophia progressed, and each had commended the other in their inmost souls long before any love was expressed. Brent senior had quite recovered his spirits in the presence of Mrs. Barbara Temple, and his easy-moved laughter was heard in dining-room and drawing-room as of old. Accordingly, to and fro, from house to house, the families went; and the young people had plenty of occasions of making love, though it was as yet unspoken.

The reader who is a swimmer often sees intrepid men of the water taking a header into the sea with a prodigious splash, and reappearing with a mighty puff and a somewhat dazed expression. These heroes call it enjoyment, and it may be. For my part, I like taking to the water gently. To stand beside some clear summer tide, and gently, with scarcely a ripple of the wave, inch by inch, to sink into the ocean, and feel that delightful em-

brace creeping up and around you, and then, at last, to lay your cheek against ocean's yielding breast and glide and paddle away, having hardly wetted the tip of your nose all the time—that is my notion of earthly paradise. Applied to love, the analogy takes this form: some people plunge into love, crash, dive, reappear, often looking a little the worse for it. Others sink into love inch by inch, letting the delightful dream enfold them slowly, till they are borne altogether away. There are, then, two schools of lovers—those who plunge, and those who inch; and those who plunge are wise, but those who inch are wiser.

Percival, either by foresight or simply through circumstance, was an “incher.” Pleasant work he found it. But is a grave history like mine to detail every nod, glance, blush, smile, sigh, and so on? or are grave students like my readers to be so trifled with? Let me, with wise reserve, be content, for this chapter at least, with one closing scene.

End of January. Weather, much rain and windy; time, 3.15 P. M.; scene, dining-room at Mrs. Barbara Temple's; persons present, Percival and Sophia. Mark, reader, they have been here since the rest rose from lunch, talking about anything or nothing, but growing warmer—at least Percival was growing warmer—every moment. He believes the hour has come. So stand the two at the window, watching the drops that course down the panes, and idly racing drop against drop. Sophia wins three drops running.

“Ah!” Percival remarks, with a sigh, “it's no use, I can never stand against you.”

Sophia thinks that she understands this, and sighs too, faintly, blushes about the thousandth part of a tint,

droops her head about the millionth part of an inch. He sees all.

"What a stormy day!" he says next.

"Very stormy."

"And yet it does not seem dull, not in here, does it?" Artful young man! he lowered his voice towards the end of the sentence, as if the very walls must not hear, but she only.

"Oh no; it does not seem a bit dull in here," she responds. There is a regular lovers' way of saying the same thing to and fro; the simpletons mean to intimate their entire oneness in all things, spoken or thought.

Sophia looked very lovely just at that moment, with the fear that is joy hovering over her, casting lights on her eyes, flushes on her cheek, and making her every slightest motion tender and gentle. He feels that now he is full in the sway of the whirlpool; on and on he will be borne until he has told her all.

"Something very singular happened to me in Australia," Percival says, bending nearer to her—"something I am half afraid to speak of."

Here he stops.

"Tell me about it," she whispers—oh! so low, so deliciously. She meant: Anything you say will be sweet to hear—especially what you are going to say.

"It was something so strange, so unforeseen! One of those things which happen we cannot tell how, leading to we cannot tell what."

He stopped again. Again she murmured one of those sentences which women never speak but to one ear only, baring their hearts.

"Tell me about it."

"While I was in Australia I fell in love with a girl, who is the queen of my heart, and shall be till I die."

Her posture never changed, not by the movement of a finger; and I do not think the sharpest watcher would have seen a quiver of her eyelid or a tremor of her lip. But the life went from her face and eyes, and the fear that is joy vanished, leaving behind the fear that is fear indeed.

"Are the girls—the girls—in Australia—very pretty?" she inquired, in a death-like voice.

The next moment she would be in his arms; the next moment his kiss would have dropped in a burning seal on her lips; the next moment she would have been his, declared so by signs which even her modesty could not have hidden. Alas! how short is the space allotted to whispering, blushing love in this rough world! Just then the dining-room door opened, and in rushed little Mr. Brent, roaring with laughter, stamping on the floor, choking, rubbing his hands. And Mrs. Barbara Temple followed, laughing, but not in his fashion.

"And then," cried the parson between his rapturous bursts, "then, without another word, down sat the dean, looking so important, so dignified, so reproving—just like an angry turkey-cock, I assure you, Mrs. Temple. Down he sat on his new hat—crash! it was stove in—his new hat! And up he jumps again, and exclaims, 'Bless me! my hat!'"

Rosy with boisterous mirth, he went up and down, not knowing what he had done, though quick-eyed Mrs. Temple suspected and would have withdrawn. Percival looked inexpressibly discomfited. Who should make the next move? It was Sophia.

"Good to have a merry heart, Mr. Brent!" she said,

smiling at him in a way which showed—he told his son as they went home—that she at least enjoyed the story. And she darted from the room. But Percival could not see her face before she was gone.

Fixed he stood, poor, baffled young fellow; the arms dropped at his side which were to have been wound about the girl he loved; his face a blank, his heart full of vexation. Meanwhile, the little rector fell into a chair, and sent up peal after peal of most obstreperous mirth. “The dean was new, and the hat was new. When he sat down we heard the crash. When he got up no one living could have told which looked more dismal, his face or his hat. ‘*Bless me! my hat!*’ I hear him saying it now, Mrs. Temple. The finest sight I ever saw. Percival, Percival, *why* don’t you laugh?”

CHAPTER XII.

A VERY SUPERFLUOUS CHAPTER, WITH NOTHING TO RECOMMEND IT BUT POETRY AND HUMOR

EVERYBODY was surprised to hear that beautiful Sibyl Temple had engaged herself to a man who, though by no means aged, was still old enough to be her father. But Archibald Goldmore was wealthy, and that explains everything. We all said that Sibyl was marrying for money. I must remark that subsequent knowledge of her led me to believe that this was a harsh judgment. Sibyl had never greatly cared for young men. Her favorite proverb—with what a curl of the lip I have seen her deliver it!—was, “Better be an old man’s darling than a young man’s warling.” She foresaw, I fancy, that as the wife of an elder she would have more liberty, be more indulged and caressed; and this motive, together with a coldness of temperament which I have remarked in other great beauties besides Sibyl, led her to accept the hand of Archibald Goldmore, Esquire.

Car’s engagement astonished everybody. Clever Car Temple—Car Temple, who read everything, who knew four languages, had studied logic, and was a perfect dictionary of dates—Car Temple the wife of young Doolittle, with his lisp and his semi-idiocy! Never, we all declared, in the whole history of matrimony, had such an absurdity been witnessed. For, in some respects, Car was the most attractive of the three. She was handsome,

stylish, dressed well, and in addition to this she had good conversation and a pleasant wit. She was the sort of girl who might have been sought out by a judge or a cabinet minister who would have wanted an accomplished and intellectual woman to shine in his drawing-room.

Both these girls, we said, were throwing themselves away; and we felt sorry for it. Each was remarkable in her way. In their minds, as in Sophia's, the lessons of the little mother had sunk deep. They, too, thought of living to please, and resolved to be brilliant and captivating. Car relied on her superior mind; Sibyl looked to her beauty; and each girl resolved to be, in her way and by the exercise of her own gift, a queen of society.

Valentine's day came round. It was the custom of these sisters always to send pretty little missives to each other on this day from real or assumed admirers; so each was sure of two pretty valentines at least. How many more came on this particular day I cannot tell; but there arrived three letters—one for Caroline, one for Sibyl, and one for Sophia—addressed in the same handwriting, and looking like anything rather than valentines. Valentines, however, they turned out to be, and those which aroused most curiosity and received most attention. Two days before the girls had been at a party, and Car had remarked, laughingly, in company, that she was low-spirited, having that morning discovered her first gray hair. On the same day Archibald Goldmore and his intended had gone out for a short walk, and had been caught in the snow. These two incidents, as it appeared, had come to somebody's knowledge, for they were plainly alluded to in the lines which each girl read in her valen-

tine. Sophia opened hers first. It was very short, and the poetry, I think, poor. Here it is:

"MISUNDERSTOOD.

"I wrote, and praised Sophia's mind,
So winning, gracious, and refined;
They, reading, said, 'This thing of grace
Must be our sweet Sophia's face.'

"And next (in words) her face I drew,
But I was then mistaken too;
Because perfection I defined
They thought I meant Sophia's mind."

"Well," exclaimed Sibyl, drawing a long breath, "I hope you are satisfied. There will be nothing left for Car and me."

"Poaching too!" cried Car. "I am not going to have *your* mind praised, you thing! for you have none. Now for mine!" She opened her envelope. "Poetry again, I declare! Listen, girls; attention!"

"HER FIRST GRAY HAIR.

"My own, my sweet, my heart of hearts,
Is cross, is sad by fits and starts;
She weeps, and then she tells the truth—
She mourns the flight of rosy youth.

"If you love me and I love you,
Let the same fate befall us two.
Would you be warm when I am cold?
Would you keep young while I grow old?

"When Time those tender cheeks shall wrinkle,
When silver hairs the chestnut sprinkle,
You shall be wrinkled less than me,
For your one gray hair I'll show three.

"And when old age has really come,
We'll sit together snug at home,
Two cronies old, with pleasing pain
Fighting Love's battle o'er again.

"Till 'See!' we'll say, 'the night is falling;
And 'Hark, a heavenly voice is calling';
We'll fly to worlds by prophets sung:
Be always loving, always young."

"Now," exclaimed Car, "this *must* be from some one that heard me the other day. It isn't Egerton; it isn't bad enough for him."

"No," Sibyl remarked gravely; "it is not bad enough for Egerton. I think it rather pretty."

"Let's have yours, then," Car cried; "they all come from the same person." So Sibyl read her valentine, and all the three were grave now with curiosity and interest.

"LOVE AND SNOW.

"Oh! once upon a wintry day,
Myself and Dear went out to play,
When, floating from the cold gray sky,
Stole many a silent snow-flake by.

"My heart was burning, hers was cold,
Though she was young and I was old;
To touch her chilly hand I strove:
'Beloved,' I said, 'who wilt not love,

"Your heart, I vow, is fixed and chill,
Like those gray skies so dead and still;
Oh, for an hour of summer glow
In skies, in hearts as cold as snow!

"This flake,' cried I, 'which falls to-day,
Upon your frozen breast I lay;
Now if it melt, I'll hope to see
Your kindling bosom melt for me.'

"In vain I watched, entranced, intent;
The snow-flake neither stayed nor went;
For which was flesh and which was snow,
There was never an eye on earth could know."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Car. "Is that your way, Sibyl—making love in a snow-shower?"

"Going out for an afternoon winter walk in a low-necked dress?" added Sophia.

"Never mind," Sibyl retorted. "I like my snow-flake better than your gray hair. What do you think, Sophy?"

"Oh! Sophy is so on the stilts about her mind—'so winning, gracious, and refined'—that she won't speak to you and me," Car said, stroking Sophia's hand, however.

At this point Mrs. Barbara Temple entered.

"Well, girls," said she, "how many valentines?"

Instantly the prettiest wit-battle began.

"One, mamma, for a lady with a face so like a mind that you can't tell which is which." And Car pointed a finger at Sophia.

"One for a lady with an admirer and a gray hair!" And Sibyl dipped a courtesy at Car.

"One for a lady with shivering shoulders!" And Sophia sent the rosy tip of her tongue—only the tip of the tip—darting out between her teeth at Sibyl.

In such rapid sentences the girls thrust at each other, and little Mrs. Temple looked on with great admiration.

"Very charming vivacity, dears. I wish somebody besides your stupid old mother was here to see. But you are all like spoiled children: you behave best when nobody is by."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH THE LOVER SAYS "WILL YOU?" AND THE LADY
SAYS "YES"

THAT evening Rector Brent and Percival appeared about five o'clock, just as the lamps were lighted in the drawing-room. Luck had it this time that Sophia should be sitting alone; and as she rose to welcome her visitors, she remarked that her mother and Sibyl were in the library and Car out for a walk. The little man, with praiseworthy readiness—perhaps he had got a hint beforehand—remarked that he would go to the library, as he wanted to speak to Mrs. Temple; and at the word he hurried from the room, and left our pair alone. Sophia, glancing at Percival, noticed that he carried a small parcel in his hand; and he, finding himself alone with her, resolved to finish his broken story. He lost no time now, having learned a lesson on that subject already.

"I was interrupted the other day when I was telling you about Australia," he remarked, drawing a chair close beside her. "Shall I finish what I was saying?"

"Do."

"That girl I am in love with so passionately, who got my heart out there"—all this came out with such tumultuous haste that she might have known what would follow—"shall I show you her portrait?"

"I should like to see it."

"I thought you would. I brought it with me," he said,

opening his packet with trembling fingers. "Only let me tell you this picture gives you a very faint idea of her. It is beautiful, but her actual face is past all likeness and all praise, soft as starlight, pure as snow, tender as the spring sunshine, full of life and truth. Oh! how I love it!"

"She must be happy," Sophia said, with a delicate sadness that whispered all he wanted to know, but the excited young fellow did not mark it. "She must be very happy. Let me look at the picture."

Almost with a sob she said it.

"I shall show it in a moment," he replied, holding it ready to turn up to the lamplight; "only let me finish my story first. It was this picture I fell in love with. I resolved when I saw the face that is here to live and die for it. Its heavenly fairness subdued me in a moment and forever, and all my fear was lest the true face should not be as lovely. I had to wait a long time before I saw the original—many months. All that time I was true to my picture, and gazed at it morning, noon, and night, till every feature was printed on my heart. Then the day came when I saw—*her*. At the sight all memory of the picture vanished quite away. Oh! how I trembled lest she should be promised to another, or lest she should not love me."

"Was she promised to another?"

"No."

Then followed a tiny sigh.

"And did she—did she— Oh! but she must!" Sophia said, turning her sad, full eyes on his manly face. "I can finish the story: she said she would love you."

"The story is not finished yet," he cried impetuously. "But you are right in one thing: you can finish it. Look, this is the picture of the girl I love."

She bent to look, and as she did so a tear she could not keep back dropped on the cardboard. The next moment she uttered a cry and started to her feet. She had seen herself.

A moment she looked at him, and such was the struggle of surprise, delight, modesty, and fear in her face, that he was now as far from her secret as a moment before she had been from his. He thought she was angry.

"Miss Temple—Sophia," he said, "don't be angry. If I have offended you, I did not mean it. Surely you won't be angry."

Still she made no answer, but only looked at him, for speech and action had forsaken her altogether; and he, foolish fellow, grew certain that she was displeased.

"I loved it so," he said, pleading. "I could not help it; and I wanted to tell you myself before I spoke to others about it. I wanted you to hear the story first from my own lips." He hung his head, ashamed to look at her. "I know I am presumptuous. I feel sure already that you will tell me I am not the man you can love. I wish I had waited a little before speaking; the dream was so much better than this awakening; but I could keep myself silent no longer. Perhaps it is as well to know it at once. It will save—"

But as he spoke, her cheek came close to his own, and her little hand fell on his shoulder. Too womanly for coquetry or coyness, she gave her answer at once, and with such readiness that neither Percival nor Sophia were able to settle that night which kissed the other first.

Just as the girls were going to bed, Car took up the portrait of Sophia, which he had left behind in his rapture. They passed it from hand to hand. It was like. It

was not. It flattered. It did not. But as they judged it, Car, turning it over, saw written in pencil on the back the eight lines of Sophia's valentine.

"A discovery!" she cried, with a little whistle: she affected that manly accomplishment. "Sophy, your Percival is the valentine man. Well, I like him for it. The poetry is not wonderful; but still, it was kind of him to think of *us* on the same day he wrote to you."

"He writes poetry!" exclaimed Sibyl. "I should not have thought it. He looks more like dictionary, Latin prose, historical essay, botanical catalogue."

"My dear, my dear," said little Mrs. Temple, who was looking over Sibyl's shoulder, "when will you understand what I have told you a hundred times? These bookish men can beat your men of fashion when they try love—when they really try. *I* shall make something of that young man; I promise it."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH CAROLINE AND SIBYL ARE TO BE SEEN ENTERING THE MARRIED STATE THROUGH GOLDEN GATES

AND so the third Miss Temple was engaged. Mamma made no objection. She did, indeed, when business came to be talked, remark to Mr. Brent that her daughter's fortune would not be large, and that she hoped he would be able to provide handsomely for his son. At this he waved his hand in a confident way, nodded, and said, "That shall be all right." He did not at that time enter into any particulars; but Mrs. Temple, from what she knew of him, was quite satisfied with this assurance, and the matter dropped.

It was soon known to the whole town that Sophia Temple was engaged to Percival Brent, and the announcement a little relieved our disappointment at the mysterious disappearance of the rector's flirtation with the widow. Indeed, some of us started the hypothesis that what we superficial investigators had mistaken for a flirtation was in reality nothing more than the settling of the preliminaries of the present affair. We said it must have been very pleasant for the two seniors to make the arrangements in that snug way; and thus we explained the little intimacy between them.

Pleasant was the early courtship of this happy pair. The very skies smiled on it. Never, I believe, was there such a February. Day followed day in the softest beauty.

Mornings crisp with frost, soft, balmy noons, evenings with red skies and frosty air again. Their love-making was full of satisfaction. Sophia found him an ingenuous young fellow, with real enthusiasm, full of active resolutions for life. True, she found it hard to be very warm over geology; but his general notion of living for a purpose delighted her. I think she would have been better pleased had he talked of getting into Parliament or entering the Church, rather than of achieving triumphs at the British Association, an institution which at that time had not emerged from the age of weakness and scorn. Still, she was fully satisfied with him, and gave him all her love. And he, for his part—it could not be otherwise—was entranced with her. Warmth, purity, tenderness, principle, all the finer parts of character were hers; taste, and no lack of humor, ready speech, lively fancy. As to her face, he worshipped it. He always said—mindful of his valentine—that her face was beautiful because it was the image of her mind. Why narrate lovers' raptures? They were all in all to each other these happy days of early spring.

In March the two weddings came off: first Car's, and then Sibyl's. Egerton Doolittle had made a special request that the two should be celebrated on the same day; but to his request the grèat Goldmore declined to comply—possibly a lurking suspicion that the thing might look ludicrous led him to say "no." Accordingly, we married Caroline and Egerton first; and a pleasant wedding it was, everything being done in most elegant style; and little Mrs. Barbara Temple looked not a day more than forty. And Rector Brent, between the occasion, the champagne, and his own amorous disposition, cast so many glances at her, and these so warm, that it seemed as if he were being

captivated anew. Car, I must say, looked splendid that morning: flashing with wit, fire in her eyes, and her attire faultless. She wore a bridal-dress of brocaded satin, and her head-dress, which was somewhat original—those girls had a tasteful way of being slightly out of the common—pleased all the ladies! The men, I believe, looked more at the head which carried it. Her veil, streaming over her superb shoulders, made her dress complete; and we all pronounced her a lovely bride. She went through the service without any nervousness; indeed, I thought with slight audacity, as if she would challenge any one to say she had made a foolish choice; Egerton Doolittle lisped his responses; and the two were man and wife together. Breakfast, as I said, went off well. Little Mr. Brent proposed bride and bridegroom, to which, with many a titter and hand sidled to his mouth, Egerton responded. He thanked them all. He believed that he *was* a very fortunate man. Here came a long pause. Fact was—confidentially—it had been his great aim in life to find a tremendously clever woman—a woman who would be able to point out whether any given work was erroneous or not. He did not like erroneous works. He might read an erroneous work without knowing it, and get his mind upset. He had married a wife who could and would tell him if a given work was erroneous, and he was very happy. He thanked everybody, and wished everybody in the room would soon be married, like himself, except those that were married already. There was no need to wish *them* married, because—with a sly expression—they were married already. (Here champagne effects became slightly prominent.) He believed he had married a tremendously clever girl—woman he meant—wife he meant—and he was very thankful. He hoped his wife would try to make him

happy—he meant he hoped he would try to make her happy—no, he meant that he *would* try to make her happy, and he hoped he would do it. Man was strong. Woman was weak. The man should use his strength to make the woman comfortable and happy, you know. As the poet had said, it was tyrannous to have a giant's strength, but it was excellent to—no, that was not it exactly. He forgot which came first. He would look it up, and send them the exact quotation by post. Anyhow, whatever the poet had said, if it was a manly act, he pledged himself to do it, but not otherwise, and he believed that was the safest way to leave it. Here he sat down, with a kind of movement as if he were going to pieces, and we all applauded heartily.

Sibyl's wedding came a fortnight later, more sedate and even more splendid. Archibald Goldmore loaded his young bride with presents so costly that I think, to have had them, some of the girls would have married Methuselah. Goldmore looked dignified enough during the service, and not old; and he walked down the aisle with a vigorous tread, so that, on the whole, the disparity in years did not appear so great as we expected.

Sophia had been chief bridesmaid, of course; and, in spite of her sister's faultless beauty, in my eyes she looked the lovelier of the two. While they were kneeling a sunbeam fell on her, and when it touched her head Heaven seemed choosing her as a bride at the same moment. Wonderful it was how the posture of prayer became that girl—the warmth and seriousness of her face seemed framed for worship or for pure, exalted love. But are the two sentiments alien?

No blunder about Goldmore's speech, you may be sure. All sober, proper, truly elephantine, and thoroughly Great

British. The language in which his reverend friend had proposed the health of himself and his wife was in the highest sense gratifying. On his wife's part and his own he thanked them sincerely. He felt, indeed, that the lady who had that morning bestowed her hand upon him was all, and more than all, that his reverend friend had called her. He felt the honor she had conferred upon him. He could assure his wife and her friends that whatever lay in his power should be done to make her the return which she deserved. It was a satisfaction to them both to know that marriage would not part them from their friends, nor from that locality. It would not be long before they should be among them as neighbors ; and he could only say, as one of the pleasantest incidents in that propinquity, that his wife and himself looked forward to seeing the present company gathered round their own table.

One thing was noticed at the wedding-feast : little Mr. Brent, usually the loudest laughter in every company, appeared grave and abstracted ; indeed, more than one person remarked a strange pallor about him which suggested a suspicion that he was struck with illness. Percival, happy with his Sophia, and with a thousand tender thoughts awakened by the ceremony of the day stirring in his breast, was not likely to observe anything except what enforced attention ; and no cloud dimmed the brightness of the lover's joy. Had Percival noticed his father's face he—used to its expressions—would have perceived that it was not illness which was impending. But Fate was kind to these loving two. It was for them a day of tender and undimmed delight—not a cloud, not a breath, not a doubt, only playful raillery, soft looks, gentle touches, sighs, and all the train of lovers' little pleasures. Their love increased wonderfully that happy day ; and it was well, for trouble was at hand.

CHAPTER XV.

ABOUT MISFORTUNE. WITH A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THE
BRAVE WAY IN WHICH WORLDLY PEOPLE ENDURE THE
AFFLICTIONS OF THEIR NEIGHBORS

It was dark as father and son drove home, and Percival was greatly startled when, almost as soon as the horses began to move, the rector threw himself upon him, and, sobbing like a child, called out,

“I am a ruined man, Percy—a ruined man !”

The explanation which followed this announcement was, in all its main features, new to Percival, who had never known any particulars of his father's affairs. The facts, which may be briefly told, were these : Brent senior was the son of a father who had married twice, and the rector had a half-brother more than twenty years older than himself. This brother, under his mother's marriage settlement, had inherited all her property, which was very large. The father had a life interest in it, but at his death the whole passed absolutely to her only child. Rector Brent's father had ever been a careless and imprudent man, who, having married fortunately, lived on his wife's money. After her death he married again, as has been said, and his second wife died in the same month as himself ; but his reckless and improvident character was plainly seen by the state in which his affairs were left. He might easily have saved, and saved handsomely, for the education and maintenance of his second son, our rector, but, as a matter

of fact, he died so deeply in debt that even his furniture had to be sold to satisfy his creditors. Young Brent was then at Oxford, preparing for the Church, but it seemed as if his whole future must be altered. At this time his brother came forward, and although he had never been kindly used by the second Mrs. Brent, he now, with great generosity, resolved to help his brother ; and he made him an ample allowance for his university expenses. Under these circumstances a very cordial friendship sprang up between the two, and this friendship had hitherto been unbroken. The elder brother did not marry, being studious ; and if not a woman-hater, certainly not a woman-hunter. As time went on, and the younger brother's position and requirements grew, the elder increased the allowance he made him, and now for several years he had been giving the rector fifteen hundred per annum. This he promised should be continued to his death, when an ample provision would be made for himself and his son. This arrangement had gone on for many years undisturbed, but a short time before, to Rector Brent's great uneasiness, his brother, then over seventy, told him he meditated marriage. The facts were soon out. A strong-minded Irish widow, of good family, with a file of tall, hungry, penniless sons, had marked him for her own. There followed, in the usual artful sequel, flattery and amiable persecution. The old man was cajoled, managed, and, in the last stages of the affair, bullied, until, without his brother's knowledge, he was actually married to the triumphant widow, who wrote to the rector, explaining the haste and secrecy of the transaction by the state of "our dear Henry's nervous system." The elder brother assured his junior that the marriage would make no difference in his allowance or his subsequent prospects, and for twelve months this

promise was kept. But the old man was growing feeble, and his wife impatient. Her sons were expensive, and she wished to secure everything for them. By what means could not be ascertained, but she spirited her husband away to the south of France. Under the plea of bronchial disease and nervous prostration, she shut him up from society; and when, a few months before, the rector, growing uneasy, had gone to Cannes to see his brother, he was not admitted to the house, being comforted by the assurance that everything was being done to restore, or at least to compose, "dear Henry's nervous system." To tell the rest in a few words, on the morning of Sibyl's marriage the poor rector received a letter, written by his brother himself, in which, after some few vague sentences about "loss of money," "failure of investments," and "increasing expenses," he plainly said that he enclosed the last check which he would ever be able to send. The letter closed with a postscript, in which the rector was reminded that already a great deal had been done for him, which genial stroke was due to the dictation of the accomplished Mrs. Brent. So our unhappy rector found himself placed in the position of the holder of a benefice worth scarcely a hundred a year, after outgoings, a costly establishment, luxurious habits, declining years, and a son who had been led to expect fortune as his inheritance.

The little clergyman behaved with singular dignity and straightforwardness. He told the whole story frankly, and seemed to develop fortitude for the trial. We were pleased to hear now from his lips some of those phrases about trust in God and resignation to the dispositions of Providence at which we had sometimes felt inclined to smile when the sleek little fellow spoke them in the pulpit. Indeed, so deep was our commiseration for the rector's misfortune

that we—who are neither a churchy nor, I fear, a very charitable people—summoned a meeting of leading parishioners, at which we resolved, by annual subscription, to raise enough to pay the curate; and thus, without directly pauperizing our clergyman, we hoped to enable him to hold his living. In this way Rector Brent was put in possession of about three hundred a year—not a bad allowance, you may say; but consider how he had lived hitherto. The carriage must be put down; the gardens must be laid out in grass; the cosey dinner-parties must be given up; Rector Brent must, for the rest of his life, walk the ways of genteel poverty.

Among the first to hear the bad news was Mrs. Barbara Temple. That excellent little woman had a maxim for every change and chance, and upon hearing the tidings she remarked that such was the world—up and down. “If the ‘ups’ were always up,” she continued, straying for an instant into philosophy, “the ‘downs’ would never have a chance. There was only so much money, so much ease, so much luck going. What one lost fell to the lot of another.” At the same time she expressed and felt genuine sorrow for Mr. Brent and for his son, who had always appeared to her a most promising young fellow.

Shortly after hearing all this Mrs. Temple rang for her maid, and sent for Sophia, who came in with a light, dancing step rare with her; her face was full of glee.

“I know what it is, mamma: you want me to look at your dress. But I saw it before you did. Frightful it is! You sha’n’t wear it, dear—not if I wear it myself.”

“Sophia, you look very pretty this morning,” the mother said, with much fondness and admiration, and a touch of sorrow too, as she thought of the disappointment the girl was about to have. “Never mind the gown; I have something to say to you.”

Sophia looked wonderingly into her mother's serious face, as she took a seat beside her.

"Life is full of trials, Sophy," the kind-hearted little worldling began. "No one is fit to live who is not ready to meet small vexations and disappointments, that perhaps at first don't seem small, and meet them with a cheerful face. One great thing is to remember—what is undoubtedly true—that most disappointments have a bright as well as a dark side. Indeed, if one looks over one's life, it is surprising to notice how many mishaps, which we either cried over or felt we would like to cry over, only we restrained ourselves, became on review matters of congratulation. Do you know, Sophy, I think sometimes, when I look back over my life, that what I called my misfortunes have in three cases out of four become either directly or indirectly sources of happiness after a year or two. I don't wish to talk boastfully, dear; but I think some of that is due to my own good common-sense.

She drew herself up, with a self-satisfied air, but instantly resumed her compassionate tone; while Sophia looked a little anxious, not knowing what was coming. She saw that her mother watched her closely as she delivered herself of these philosophic morsels.

"I shall not delay what I have to say," Mrs. Temple went on, stroking her girl's hand kindly. "I have heard something this morning which renders your marriage with young Brent impossible."

"Mamma!" Sophia cried, in great agitation.

"These things happen, Sophy," the mother continued—"these things often happen. I never told any of you girls before, but I assure you the first man that proposed to me—and to whom I was on the point of being married—had to fly from England to avoid transportation."

"Mamma!" Sophia cried again, but now springing to her feet, with a face white with fear and pain. "Tell me; what is it? He can't—oh! he *can't* have done anything wrong!"

"Nothing wrong, dear," she answered. "I only mentioned my case as in some respects like yours. No; the Brents are honorable people, but they are beggars this morning, Sophy—beggars."

Then, in as few words as she could use, the little woman, with most perfect lucidity, told the story of the disaster, remarking, when she came to the manœuvring widow, that the rector ought to have kept a sharper eye on his brother.

"Because we all know, Sophy, that there are always widows who will do these things if they can. I should as soon think of leaving my jewel-box all night open on my front door-step as of leaving a rich relation unguarded—if it was my policy to get his money. Now, don't cry, dear," she added, seeing her girl's tears flowing fast; "things might have been much worse."

"I am not crying now, mamma," Sophia said, sobbing, however, while she spoke. "I was frightened at first by what you said. At least, these are tears of relief, I mean. I really felt afraid of I don't know what. But it is only money Percival has lost—not character, not honor."

"Oh no, his honor is untouched," the mother replied. "His character is as good as ever; and that will, of course, stand by him when he goes in search of employment. Besides, I am glad on your account, dear; for even the most transient connection of your name with a person who had done anything wrong would be disagreeable."

Sophia said nothing. She was drying off her tears with

great briskness and assiduity. It is a pleasant sight to see a pretty young woman wiping her tears away and feathering herself into cheerfulness again.

"Excellent good sense, Sophia," the mother said, looking at her with great approval. "I always knew, with your sound judgment, you would come to this view of the matter; but I was prepared for a little temporary reluctance and a little girlish romance, and I was prepared to bear it kindly, dear, and to wait for the return of good sense, which I knew would not be delayed long. But you are a wise girl, Sophy—nothing like facing the inevitable boldly, and at once."

"But, mamma," Sophia said, "it is not such a great trial. Percival can work. We both can wait."

"Oh! then I have mistaken you!" exclaimed the mother. "Now, Sophy, my dear, you must not be absurd. This marriage is simply impossible. Wait as long as you may, the young man cannot make a fortune such as you should expect and require. You will see this some day."

"I promised him I would love him always," Sophia said, with artlessness which in another woman might have seemed affected; "and am I to break my word because my poor fellow is unfortunate? He has done nothing. Is he to lose his money and—and me too?"

At which dreadful prospect Sophia began to cry again, and worked at her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, which she had twisted into a sort of a ball, as crying women do.

"It is a very nice, kind way of talking, Sophy," the little diplomatist said; "and it does you credit, dear. I almost think I like you better for it—sweet, sweet girl!" with a kiss at each adjective. "But we must be prudent, dear. Believe me, Sophy, nothing that is imprudent is ever kind

in the long run. It may appear so ; it never is—not kind even to those it seems most to benefit. In life, dear, everything depends on prudence.”

“Mamma,” Sophia cried, rising from her chair for the second time, “if you had told me that Percival had been disgraced I think I should have died. If you had told me that the man who spoke to me as he spoke had any secret dishonor, I think I should have killed myself in grief and shame. I know the world would never have been the same to me again. But his fortune, his money—what is that? Mamma, I promised to love him and to marry him, and nothing but his own fault shall make me change. Not if he lost ten fortunes! It would be hard on him,” she repeated, with another rub of her eyes, “to lose his money, and then to lose me.”

Mother and daughter, there they sat. The mother was not angry, scarcely disappointed, quiet, confident, fully assured that the victory would be on her side at last. Were not time and money with her, and who with such auxiliaries ever lost a battle? And there sat the daughter, tearful, flushed, affectionate, longing to have her Percival beside her to console him. Ah! sweet Sophia Temple, some there were as well as Percival who, for a few of those tender, dewy kisses, then budding on thy lips, would have lost half the world, and scarcely sighed as it slipped away.

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL ABOUT MISFORTUNE; BUT CONTAINING NOW AN EXAMPLE OF THE WAY IN WHICH UNWORLDLY PEOPLE BEAR THEIR OWN AFFLICTIONS

PERCIVAL called upon Sophia that afternoon, and, for some wise reason, Mrs. Barbara Temple allowed him to see her alone. Indeed, the little woman was never other than kind to her daughters; and, being sure that Sophia's madness could not last, she resolved not to seem tyrannical. So she let the boy and girl have it all to themselves.

Percival, impulsive in his wretchedness, told Sophia everything in a breath. He was stout-hearted enough to hide his grief pretty well; and he hastily assumed, as a kind of postulate of the whole conversation, that Sophia would think of nothing but of giving him up. Thus he raised in her a light, sweet petulance, which caused her to leave his dark illusion unscattered for a while.

"I shall go out to Australia again and begin life," he said, with a manful air.

She could not look at him, or she would have been in his arms, so she stood half turned from him, with down-cast eyes, and he, watching her, felt his heart sink. He had faintly hoped for other things.

"Yes, I shall go out to Australia again," he repeated, so sadly that Sophia could hardly, even for an instant, hold herself back. "It is a fine climate," he added, trying to seem unconcerned again.

"You will meet some girl out there," she answered, in the very exultation of hypocrisy, "and you will like her very well."

"I shall never love any one again," he said gravely, and his voice grew unsteady at the last word. "Only you," he added, in a yet more shaking voice. That bit of unsteadiness finished Sophia off.

"Never do!" she cried — "never do! I ask nothing more of you; and then go round and round the world, and I shall wait here faithfully till you come back!"

So her little bit of deceit was over, and she was sobbing in his arms, telling him that he was ten thousand times dearer to her now, because she could show her love to him; and that no other man should ever call her his own, with twenty other of those silly speeches made on such occasions; some of which, as declaring the nobler impulses of the heart that God has made, will be remembered, I doubt not, when ten thousand human frailties are blotted out of the book of his remembrance. And Percival, holding the lovely girl in his arms, felt how little he had lost, and how much he had gained in that very loss; and he realized something of the truth of Him who knew the human heart, and said that there are times when in very loss of life we find life anew—life which cannot perish and cannot be defiled.

There! They spoke no more, not another sentence, for many minutes, but stood folded in each other's arms, mingling tears, enraptured, exchanging, by a thousand fond pressures heart against heart, emotions, vows, protestations, which the narrow channels of speech can never convey.

"You are all the world to me," he said at last.

"All the world?—am I?" she answered softly. "Oh! Percy! Percy!"

"And you will go on loving me, Sophia?"

"Forever and ever."

"Better or worse—richer or poorer?"

"Yes, till death us do part; nothing else shall—never, Percy!"

So it went on, silence and speech alternating, for fully an hour. Mrs. Barbara Temple was a wise woman, but I somewhat doubt the astuteness of her policy on that particular afternoon.

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CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH "GOOD-BY, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BY" IS SET TO
VERY MOURNFUL MUSIC INDEED

THE two married sisters returned from their honeymoons about the same time, Sibyl looking haughty and discontented, but Caroline cheerful and well pleased. As to the bridegrooms, we could see no trace of change for better or for worse in Goldmore; but Egerton was decidedly stouter, in excellent spirits, and, from an accession of confidence, more apt to make a fool of himself in company than ever.

The sisters soon met, and Sophia could not complain of any lack of sympathy on the part of her elders. They were both at first inclined to take prudent mamma's view, but when Sophia told them of her love and constancy they were touched. The world had not yet got complete mastery over them, and they commended Sophia, kissed her, comforted her, and said some day she would be happy.

Commander-in-chief Mrs. Barbara Temple took care to have an interview with young Brent. She was kind and sympathetic, but she said it was her maternal duty to point out to him that—whatever Sophia might say—she was injuring her prospects if he kept up any understanding with her. "Engagement, of course," the little woman said, "is not to be thought of. But even an arrangement—a promise that each will secretly wait for

each—would be a pernicious snare, full of danger to Sophia's prospects."

"Not," added Mrs. Worldly Wisewoman, "that these promises are *ever* kept. Facts are too much even for lovers. I have seen fifty of these understandings made in perfect good faith, and from motives that were quite pretty, but none ever came to anything. Still, I object to arrangements."

"Your daughter is as free as if she never saw me," Percival said. "I have made her promise that she will consider that there is not a shred to bind her to me. She is to feel that she may engage herself and marry, and never think that there is any intimation to be sent to me except through the newspaper."

"And may I ask—don't think me rude, Mr. Brent; I am simply doing my duty—if *you* are as free on your side? If you marry shall she hear of it through the newspaper too?"

She looked at him sharply, almost humorously, as she put this penetrating question. Oh, we must pay a tribute to our little mother who had a tact that in wider fields of action might have smoothed the feelings of ruffled empires.

"Yes, I am quite as free as she," he answered. "We promised each other that we should feel so."

It was quite true. They had promised exactly in these terms, only the four lips that exchanged the treaty were immediately afterwards engaged together sealing quite another sort of bond. Was this what Shakespeare meant by "plain and holy innocence," I wonder? And yet possibly Mrs. Barbara Temple guessed the true state of the case, but she was satisfied. There being no engagement, she felt sure that time, fickleness, and her great ally, this present world, would do all she wanted.

"I regret what has happened," she said gracefully; "and I regret it not alone on your account, but on my own. I should have been pleased with the connection. I hope you will prosper and be happy, for I am sure you deserve it."

Egerton Doolittle, having, after careful intellectual filtration, so to speak, got the facts of the Brents' case fairly deposited in his mind, expressed great commiseration for the two poor men, as he called them. He told Car that "we ought all to give our minds to the thing," and see what can be done. And after a long period of cogitation he informed his wife that he had hit on a plan which would restore the fortunes of the Brents, and—of this he made a great point—without their undertaking anything that could not be done "with clean hands."

"A gentleman under no circumstances should soil his hands," Egerton said; "and the great merit of what I propose is that it can be done with clean hands."

Car at first thought that this implied that the pursuit Egerton had in his mind was one morally defensible or not felonious, but it appeared that he referred only to aristocratic notions and traditions.

"My plan is this," Egerton said, after three quarters of an hour of preamble which had nearly fidgeted his wife into a fit. "I hear there is a new joint-stock opera company going to be started. Let them take shares in that. It will be a gentlemanly musical kind of thing, and the great point is it can be done with clean hands."

Caroline not being able to see the practical value of this suggestion, Egerton resolved to open his scheme to his great brother-in-law, Goldmore. That elephantine millionaire was forced, for courtesy's sake, to listen while Doolittle, in a speech of extraordinary length and maddening circum-

locution, brought out his preface ; but, vexed as he was, he could not restrain his laughter when the young man wound up with the recommendation that Brent senior and junior should take shares in the forthcoming Italian opera joint-stock company.

“My great point is, Goldmore,” said Egerton, “that it is a gentlemanly musical sort of thing, and one that can be carried on with clean hands. I think a gentleman should never soil his hands, Goldmore, don’t you?”

“The difficulty is,” replied the great man, overlooking his question, “where are the poor men to get money to buy their shares?”

“Get what?” Egerton asked.

“Money to buy their shares,” repeated Goldmore. “Shares are not given away : you have to pay for them in hard cash. Now, in the present case the difficulty is that there is no cash at all.”

“Then I suppose you don’t approve of my scheme?” answered Egerton, with some irritation. “Very well. One can only suggest. I withdraw the proposition. Still, I repeat, Goldmore, it is not every day of the week you can find a gentlemanly musical undertaking that can be carried out with clean hands.”

So he took his leave. But his visit had some result, after all ; for that afternoon Archibald Goldmore called upon young Brent, and asked for a little private conversation with him. Goldmore was very kind, inquired what his young friend was going to do, nodded his head approvingly over the details of the Australian scheme, and marked the young fellow out as a man that would rise.

“Let me say one thing to you, Mr. Brent,” he said, as he rose to go. “I am in most respects a self-made man. I know the difficulties which even industrious and clever

young fellows have to face who start without capital. Now, from what my wife tells me, you have gained the affections of my sister-in-law ; and I may add that, from what I have seen of you, I am not surprised at it. As a member of the family, I take an interest in all that concerns them. Now, Brent, if a few hundreds will help to start you, I can lend you the sum, and I shall require no security but your word. You shall pay me"—this he added pleasantly—"when you are half as rich as I am."

Brent colored very red with gratitude and pleasure, but for all that his reply was not what the great man expected.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said—"it is so kind an offer. But I have already saved enough to start me. I had a liberal allowance, and never spent it all."

"A few hundreds extra will better your chance," remarked the other.

"Thank you a thousand times," the young fellow replied ; "but if I can accomplish what I wish out of my own resources, I had rather do it. If I ever marry Miss Temple, I should like to feel that it was my own doing from first to last."

Goldmore looked at him with admiration.

"I respect the feeling, Mr. Brent," he said. "Only remember this : if your capital should run short, write to me, and you will find me no bad banker when the account has to be overdrawn."

"Thank you again," the young fellow answered. "And that offer I do accept. You understand me, don't you? If I can manage without any man's help I should be glad, but rather than fail I should most gratefully avail myself of yours. I hope you don't think me proud to the point of silliness."

"Confound it!" cried Goldmore, "I wish you were my son."

And the great man marched away down the street as like the Tower of Babel as ever, only in hat, gloves, and other human fittings. But Goldmore is on the right side of things for all his pomp and seeming hardness.

Little Mrs. Barbara Temple showed a singular mixture of astuteness and good feeling in her management of the affair from this time until Percival's departure. She took care to impress on the lover the fact that all engagement, understanding, hope, and whatever else could bind himself and Sophia together, was utterly at an end. She repeated several times that her duty as Sophia's mother was to see that her future was not embarrassed by foolish obligations hastily taken up, and perhaps retained from a sense of honor when inclination would cast them off. She told Brent that in all human probability Sophia would marry some one else in twelve months. Thus she put herself in the position of being able, with perfect honesty, to assure Sophia at any future day that Percival Brent neither did nor could expect her to wait for him. And having thus made her position good, with rare moderation, or rather far-sightedness, she did not prevent the young couple meeting occasionally, during the few weeks that intervened between the breaking of the engagement and Brent's departure for Australia.

Mrs. Barbara Temple went yet further in the way of good-natured concession. On the day when Brent came to take his final leave she contrived to be out of the way, sending an apology by Sophia for her absence. It was a courageous act, but worldly-wise, I presume, like all she did. I believe to the day of her mother's death Sophia never forgot this particular concession. It showed such

trust in her daughter, such kind desire not to deprive her of any secret comfort which the parting might give. In fact, it was an act of womanly generosity and courage of which few mothers would have been capable. But have I not said already that our little mother was as truly queen of women as Agamemnon was king of men?

Sophia tried to be cheerful that dull May afternoon; for she saw that her poor fellow's heart was breaking. Indeed, he could hardly speak one word. She had to tell him of a magnificent present which she had made to him in secret, and which was now waiting for him in London. This was a set of foreign travelling-boxes, furnished with everything the good little creature could think of as being possibly of use to her dear one when he was far away. I wish I could give a catalogue of the articles in leather, glass, steel, silver; how she had slipped into one part a Bible and a prayer-book; the little medicine-chest, with a book, under the guidance of which you could heal yourself of any disease; down to needles and thread—"stout thread for buttons." Her account of it was like a shopman's catalogue. She grew so interested in her cleverness and forethought that she half forgot the impending parting. Bless the heart of woman! how it lives in the present, and will not realize the future, be it ever so near. Then, blushing, she told him of one particular little pocket in one particular little leather case, which he was never to open unless he happened to want money very badly. He might have lost everything, and not be able to get back to England. In that case let him open that pocket. He might be very ill, and have nothing to pay the doctor. In that case let him open that pocket. In any capital and inextricable difficulty let him open that pocket. Poor Sophia! the savings of thrifty years, and the better part of her allowance for I don't

know how many more (mortgaged to Car and Sibyl), had gone into those boxes and that pocket.

All this time, while she chatted on, trying desperately to be cheerful, he had said little or nothing. At last he took out his watch, and looked at it, gathering strength.

"I must go now," he said.

Then in an instant, like a frail hut swept away by a sudden hurricane, all her little cheerfulness was gone. Her steadiness, her heroism, were worth nothing at all.

She cast herself on his breast—he was to sustain her now—crying, caressing him, clinging to him, as if she could not let him go.

"Percy," was all she said—"darling Percy!"

And he said nothing. One thing his manliness enabled him to do: he kept silence. But not a word could he utter.

"It is the sea between us," she said, sobbing. "Such a distance of sea! such a length of time!"

He only clasped her to his breast.

"But I shall not forget you: you won't forget me; promise it!"

No sound came from his lips; but somehow she understood by his clasp that, with an unuttered vow, he was binding himself to her forever.

"Promise me again," she murmured.

Still he did not make any audible reply.

"Promise me once more," she whispered; and, still without any speech, she was satisfied that he replied.

There followed a moment of silence, she offering up a prayer for his safety; and in what shrine so fit could she offer it as there on his manly breast? Then she felt his arms gathering round her in an embrace stronger, it seemed, than death. It was as if a giant clasped her: she

was like a willow wand, and his were arms of steel. Could such an embrace ever be unloosed? Yes; in a moment she was standing alone on the floor, he was passing out of the room, she cast herself helplessly on the sofa—and they were parted now.

All the time he had never spoken. But the silence of his farewell was more to her than any language could have been. He could not speak for grief. The intensity of his vow was beyond all language. Sophia often looked back with a sort of sorrowful pride to that silent farewell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRANGE SPECTACLE OF A SLEEPING WOMAN KISSING A PICTURE

AND now, the field being clear for her operations, our little Agamemnon in petticoats prepared for her part of the affair. She was fully determined to root out of her daughter's mind the memory of Percival Brent, and to marry Sophia brilliantly before many months were out. No sooner had the young lover departed than she perceived how much she had furthered her own ends by her indulgence to her daughter these last few days, especially at the parting hour. Sophia was quite tender with her when they met, kissed her, fondled her, and was all the evening so affectionate amid her hardly repressed grief that the little plotting woman began to discover a soft place in her own stony heart. She was gentle with Sophia, and took no direct notice of the poor girl's tears, which would come once or twice during the evening; only, as she passed, stroked her head softly, intending to signify that she sympathized with her, which she really did. To-morrow she would turn over a new leaf.

"Sophy," she said at breakfast, "it is ten years this month since we were in Paris. I have a fancy to go over there before the weather gets too hot. Would you like it?"

"Anywhere with you, dear," Sophia replied cheerfully. She was determined not to mope, and to begin early.

"That's pleasant," the mother answered, with a beaming look. "We shall start this day week."

Dresses had to be ordered, hotels had to be chosen, a hundred preparations had to be made, and Mrs. Temple saw with exultation that Sophia entered into all the plans with great spirit. The mother read in this a sign that already Percival was fading out of mind. "I was sure he would," the little woman said to herself. "Of course he *must* as time goes on."

They stayed a month in Paris, and the whole of the time she managed to keep Sophia entertained in the most diverting way. They had friends there, and the days were passed in a set of choice little pleasures; and whatever that inexhaustible purse of Mrs. Temple's could do to burnish the hours was done with her own taste and tact.

"I shall show Sophia what the world is!" the world's worshipper said to herself; "and that Australian boy will soon vanish from her mind, and love in a cottage with him. Cottage indeed!—not if you can get a house; and not a house if you can get a mansion! Oh! it is wonderful how slow Sophia is to see the value of life! But she is beginning, and with her good sense she will soon be able to teach instead of being taught."

And now, to Mrs. Temple's unspeakable gratification, there appeared on the scene a man who was plainly thinking of making Sophia an offer. Had the little woman been choosing a suitor she could not—so she said afterwards—have made a more promising selection. I must not say much about him. He was ten years Sophia's senior, sedate but not gloomy in his manner, his fortune was ample, his birth high, and his appearance was considered prepossessing. He had long been resident in the

neighborhood of Kettlewell, but it was in Paris they were first introduced. He met the mother and daughter at dinner. Mrs. Barbara Temple, hearing of him before, had already wished inly that he might be struck with Sophia. She marked him as he walked into the room, and at sight of him her wishes redoubled. During dinner she watched him narrowly. For a time he did not seem to have even noticed Sophia, but at last he looked at her. The little mother saw his gaze arrested in pleasurable surprise, and for the rest of the evening he managed to look at the young girl as often as possible.

The next day the stranger, whose name was Prendergast, made some excuse for calling upon them, and you may be sure he was graciously received. His conversation pleased Sophia, that was plain; and Mrs. Temple, watching him, saw in his manner that which delighted her beyond expression.

Next day a fresh invitation came from the friend at whose house they had first met—just a hasty party, the note said.

"Aha!" little Mrs. Temple said to herself, "a hasty party! Got up at the instigation of Prendergast, I dare swear. Sherwood and he are such friends. If Prendergast does not take Sophia down to dinner I am much mistaken."

He did. And he proved a genial companion, with plenty of talk of the quieter sort. He could interest cultivated women, being artistic and literary, without being a pedant or a bore—that, at least, was his friends' opinion of him.

"Don't you think Mr. Prendergast very entertaining?" the mother asked as they drove home.

"Very," Sophia replied emphatically.

The little woman nearly skipped off her seat for triumph.

During these early days Mrs. Temple could never quite make out whether or not Sophia perceived that this promising Mr. Prendergast was in love with her. In love he clearly was, but his manner was so unobtrusive and his general conversation so lively that even Sophia might not have detected what was plain to the watching eyes of her mother. It was a nice point for Mrs. Temple to settle. Sophia evidently enjoyed their new friend's society, and as she was no coquette—not as much as she ought to be, her mother used to say—she must either have forgotten one lover or not recognized the other. Which was the fact Mrs. Temple longed to know. Sometimes she thought Sophia was in reality pre-occupied, and only assumed a vivacity to cover her want of interest. At other times, and more frequently, Mrs. Temple felt convinced that she was truly pleased with Prendergast, and would, after a decent interval, confess her satisfaction.

At last an evening came when Prendergast, calling in upon the Temples, found the mother and daughter at home, and after a little conversation music happened to be mentioned, at which Mrs. Barbara made the most casual remark about Sophia having sung a particular song the night before. Prendergast asked if he might hear it, and Sophia consenting, with a listless air sat down to the piano and sung. Prendergast praised the song, asked for another and another, and Sophia complied in the same listless way. She sang well, but her eyes had a kind of far-off look, very suggestive of Australia. The little mother, however, could not see Sophia's face; Prendergast's she saw, and it told her a great deal. At last Sophia began, "Oft in the still Night," and now (no doubt because the theme touched her) she sang with

great expression and tenderness, and her admirer stood over her, radiant with love and admiration.

"Oh! that I could see her!" murmured Mrs. Barbara. She scanned Sophia eagerly when the song was finished, but her expression said neither "Yes" nor "No." Shortly after, Prendergast bade them good-night, and restrained as his manner usually was, he now, either through accident or with design, let Sophia know the state of his heart. Mrs. Barbara Temple saw a flush come out on her daughter's pale face as she withdrew her hand from his.

"Now we shall see," thought the little woman. "Very prettily he managed it, too—I observed nothing."

She resolved not to ask Sophia any question until next morning; but after she had retired a little while, curiosity got the better of her, and in her dainty dressing-gown she crossed over to her daughter's room, and, tapping gently at the door, stepped in.

She saw—not what she expected. Sophia was not at her glass, nor chatting to her maid, nor gone to sleep. The poor girl was at her prayers, and had not heard her mother enter. The little woman stood a moment irresolute, then vanished from the room with a kind of hop; she scarcely liked the prospect of confronting the serious face which she knew would rise to greet her from between those uplifted hands.

"I shall go to bed," she said, when she regained her own room; "and I shall talk to Sophia in the morning."

She sat down, however, and fell into a muse, and a look of unwonted gravity ruled her face and features for a time. Probably she was recalling past scenes; for two or three times she shook her head with a kind of reflective sadness, until she was roused by the second chime which had sounded since she last sat down.

"I wonder if Sophy is up now?" she murmured. "She can't be *at that* so long."

And, changing her mind, she again stepped over, and finding the door ajar as she left it, she entered the room once more. The lamp was still burning, but Sophia was in bed, and, her silence indicated, sleeping. The mother walked softly across, and looked at her daughter.

She was fast asleep. The night was warm, and she had thrown back the quilt a little, and her arm, her brown hair, and a glimpse of her white and innocent breast, together with the repose of her expression, made up a picture which many an artist would have given a year's income to paint. She looked the very image of purity and peace, and even little Mrs. Barbara, who was shot-proof against most forms of emotion, felt moisture stealing into her eyes as she gazed. She bent a little down, and then she saw that the face, now so calm, had been traversed by recent tears. Yes, Sophia had been crying since she lay down, and she had fallen asleep with wetted cheeks.

Something in her hand caught her mother's eye, and she looked closer still. Her hand was beside her face, and the little article she held was placed so that her sleeping lips just touched it. With great caution and stillness Mrs. Barbara Temple lowered her eyes, and, stooping and stretching, she managed to see what her daughter was holding. It was a miniature of Percival Brent.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE UNDERTAKES TO PRODUCE A GREAT REALISTIC AND DOMESTIC DRAMA, ENTITLED "THE SPIDER AND THE FLY"

GREATLY was Mrs. Barbara Temple disappointed when the day came for leaving Paris, and still Prendergast had made no further sign. What could it mean? He was the last man in the world to play the coquette masculine; and it was plain that he had assumed the flirtation posture towards Sophia in his sober sort of way. Why advance so far and then stand still? Mrs. Barbara Temple pondered. Then cries she to herself, "I have hit it!" Her explanation was this: Sophia had quietly signified to Prendergast, by one of those tokens with which love's intercourse abounds, that she loved him not. And he, retiring and even diffident, had taken the hint submissively.

"Very provoking of Sophy!" the little woman said. "Very provoking, indeed! If it would do any good I should lose my temper with her. But it would not do good—not yet. Prendergast was just the man for her. I am angry, but I will keep my temper."

And she had her reward. To her great joy, no sooner had they returned to Kettlewell than Prendergast appeared on the scene again, and his attitude towards Sophia had not shifted by a hair's-breadth. Evidently, then, Sophia had not repulsed him after all.

"How fortunate I did not get into a passion!" the ruler of her spirit remarked to herself. "It is a good maxim: Never be really angry; don't even seem to be angry often. I should have had Sophy crying, and set her against Prendergast for life, and all on account of my own hasty judgment."

Prendergast's coming to Kettlewell was in a marked way. He did not stay with anybody, but put up at the hotel; and when he called on the Temples he said that he had run over for a few days, in the hope of increasing the pleasant acquaintance with themselves.

Mrs. Barbara Temple beamed on him one of her brightest looks.

"You speak of your pleasure in renewing the acquaintance," she said. "You say nothing about ours. I can never forget all your attention to us in Paris. And what a pleasant time that was!"

"Part of my visit to Paris," he remarked significantly, "I enjoyed more than anything in my life."

He spoke quietly; and Mrs. Temple, glancing at her daughter, saw her bend over her little morsel of lace-work with a crimson cheek.

"She knows now, at all events," the mother said triumphantly.

And when Prendergast took his leave Mrs. Temple resolved fairly to open her mind to Sophia.

"I have never, Sophy," she began—"never in my life seen a man who more takes my fancy." The door was hardly shut upon him. "At first I thought him rather dull and—well, sanctified." Here our little vivacious sinner made the smallest and genteelest face of scorn. "But that soon wears off; and I declare that, in spite of my first impression, I find him the most truly lively, enter-

taining, accomplished man I have ever met. What do you think, Sophy?"

"He is very agreeable," Sophia said seriously.

"Polite without affectation, witty without coarseness, serious without cant," Mrs. Temple went on, in true eighteenth-century high style. "He is a specimen of moderation in all things; and moderation, Sophia, next to repose of manner, is the great mark of a gentleman. A gentleman should be a little of everything and not too much of anything. Have you ever met so accomplished a man?"

"Yes," Sophia replied, dexterously affecting not to hear the last part of her mother's speech, "he is all you say. I like him greatly."

"I am going to ask him to dinner," Mrs. Temple said.

"What, mamma!" exclaimed Sophia. "Company so soon! Wait a little!"

"Not company, child," the mother answered. "All alone. He will like it better than a party."

"And spoil one of our little snug evenings," Sophia murmured. "Don't, mamma."

"Now, what is there in our evenings you so enjoy, Sophia?"

"Oh!" that dear hypocrite answered, "I enjoy the quiet—and—and our music—and—and your talk, mamma, and all your funny, lively stories. You are the best company in the world!"

She put her hands caressingly round her mother's neck; and the mother, who always showed herself pleased with every mark of affection from her daughters, drew one round, white arm along her lips, giving it a succession of tiny kisses.

"Poor Prendergast will find it terribly dull at the ho-

tel, Sophy. Really, it would be quite barbarous to leave him there alone."

"Well, if you must have him, mamma, have some people to meet him."

"I don't think he would care for that."

"If he wants society it is just what he would care for, mamma."

"But he does not want society," the mother replied—"only a little friendly chat and music. Yes," she added, resolved to carry her point at once, "I shall sit down and write a note to him this moment."

The note was sent that evening, but no answer came. Mrs. Temple began to think she must be altogether out in her surmises. But at twelve o'clock next morning, when Sophia was walking in the town, the name of Mr. Prendergast was announced, and he stepped into the room with an apology for the early call on his lips, and yet with an air which plainly said, "My business is my excuse." Mrs. Barbara Temple assured her visitor that his call was not inopportune.

"In fact," she said, with one of her engaging laughs, "I am famished for a little scandal. Scandal, if you please!"

"My call," Prendergast remarked quietly, "is not of that character. The fact is," he continued, opening his business at once, "I have been greatly struck by your daughter. I wish to use no flattering language, but I assure you that never, never have I seen any young lady who seemed to me to possess half her attractions. She is a lovely girl!"

He stopped, and a slight moisture in his eyes signified that he was speaking from his heart. Mrs. Temple made a graceful inclination of her head.

"It is always agreeable to a mother to hear her daughter praised," she said. "You have not overrated Sophia, as I, who have watched her from her cradle, can tell you."

"I came to see you this morning partly on your account," Prendergast continued. "I know the responsibilities and anxieties of a mother, left in sole charge of so attractive a girl. I do not wish to add to them, and the least intimation of disapproval of my suit on your part will be sufficient to make me abandon it at once, and finally."

Possibly this grave gentleman, having eyes in his head, may have known that the little mother was dying to call him son-in-law; and this noble speech may have had a trace of humbug in it. But Mrs. Barbara revered this sort of humbug. It was more spicy than real. She would not have liked Prendergast for really meaning all this civil consideration; but for pretending to mean it, and for uttering the pretence with an air so perfectly Pharisaic, she could have kissed him there and then. So, Pharisee feminine against Pharisee masculine, she looked at him with a small and pensive sigh,

"How few men show such consideration!"

"I came also," said he, "on my own account. If Miss Temple is engaged, or if she is not likely to look with favor upon me, I had rather know it. At least, you might give me your—your—*advice*."

Mrs. Temple liked him better than ever.

"Sly fellow!" she said to herself. "If he dances as neatly as he plays demure, he must make a good figure at a ball."

Aloud she remarked,

"In these matters I always like to speak with the greatest possible frankness. We are not driving a bargain

across a counter. Your offer is to me, so far as I know you at present"—the defenceless woman inserted this attorney clause with the sweetest smile—"most gratifying. I believe you would try to make Sophia happy, and would succeed."

It was Prendergast's turn to incline his head now, and he did it.

"As to Sophia," continued the mother, joining the tips of her fingers in a pondering sort of way, "that is a much more intricate matter."

"She is not engaged, is she?" the suitor cried hastily.

"She is not. She is perfectly unfettered. But there has been a sort of attachment; her affections have been—"

"I understand," Prendergast said, with a grave face. "You wish to break it gently to me. I can assure you I should never try in the remotest way to take from another man affections I should so treasure if they were my own."

He was speaking his real mind now, and Mrs. Temple looked at him, hovering between admiration and amusement. She had lived in a world of honor, but not quite honor of this sort; however, she always made her bow to virtue when it was well-dressed and expressed itself genteelly.

"A most high-minded feeling," she said. "Just as I should feel myself. But in the present case such scruples would be out of place. This is only a boy and girl affair; there is no money, no prospect, no hope. I have said myself—kindly, but firmly—that a marriage, or even an engagement, is out of the question."

"And you do not think Miss Temple's heart is irrevocably given away?"

It was a lesson in posture and grimace to see the little

worldling's pantomimic answer. She disjoined the fingertips, and her white hands with upward palms, her gently raised eyebrows, her shoulders quivering with a scarcely perceptible shrug, her quick, significant smile, were each members of an unspoken sentence. The meaning was, "The female heart—*our heart*—is seldom given irrevocably. Try for yourself." It was perfectly Parisian.

"In that case," Prendergast said, reading her like print, and with rising spirits, "I am full of hope."

"You may be," she answered ; "but still, my daughter is not an ordinary girl. There must be great care. Every step must be taken with thought, and with an end in view. In a word, Mr. Prendergast, I think you had better be guided by me from first to last."

"I shall, most thankfully," he said ; and then he composed himself to listen to his monitress.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE DEMONSTRATES THE PRACTICAL HARMONY BETWEEN TWO GRAND MOTIVES OF CONDUCT—"HONOR YOUR PARENT" AND "SERVE YOURSELF"

MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE was in her glory. For a less complicated or a more immediately hopeful undertaking she would scarcely have cared. Sophia she well knew was not an easy woman to turn, and still less was she easy to beguile. Percival Brent had really taken the girl's fancy. He was more prepossessing, with his youth and his generous ways, than this grave, serious stranger verging on middle life. And the mother found by experience that affection with Sophia was not mere whim or fancy, much less self-interest or passion. Its roots struck deep. For Mrs. Temple's present purpose the mere vulgar bribes of wealth and ease were not enough : all kinds of motives must be engaged ; auxiliaries from innumerable quarters must be united ; the campaign must be carefully planned ; the advance made neither too early nor too late, just at the moment of fate ; and then the kingdom of Sophia's heart would be won. But all this only kindled Mrs. Barbara Temple into excitement. Marrying Car and Sibyl had been child's play : here was a game for a mistress. She felt the same exultation which a chess-player feels who, long used to engage with adversaries to whom he can give a castle and win easily, sits at last facing an enemy who would win if he got a pawn or a move.

"Everything must be done at the right time," she said. "Everything must be done in the right way. Whom can I trust for that? Whom? Nobody except myself!"

First of all she talked to Prendergast herself. Mingling a certain deference for his opinion with unconcealed reliance on her own, she told him that for the present he had better not make any advances to Sophia.

"Rather the opposite," she said. "Seem to retreat. Sophia has already noticed your liking for her. Now if you withdraw for a while you will puzzle her. She will say, 'Did he admire me after all, or not? Has he, on coming to know me better, found me less attractive?' You will excite her curiosity, which, let me tell you, is a great thing for a lover to do. Besides, although Sophia may not care for you, having once secured your admiration she will not like to lose it. No woman wishes that a man who once admired her should cease to admire her. She may not care for him—she may even have an aversion to him—but she likes him to care for her. And, I say, if Sophia finds that you grow cooler, she will wonder, question with herself, feel a little piqued; and then, if you turn round again and confess her power—well—well—she will be rather more disposed to give you some slight encouragement. Am I letting you into too many of our secrets, Mr. Prendergast?"

"With your knowledge of the heart," he answered, "I could have vanquished Cleopatra."

She bowed, but scarcely took time to taste the flavor of the compliment. No sooner was luncheon over than, making some excuse for dropping Sophia at a friend's house at one end of the town, she drove out to see Sibyl, the first ally whose co-operation she meant to secure. Sibyl was alone in the drawing-room, and certainly all

around were abundant signs of the magnitude of the price she had fetched in the matrimonial exchange. She looked very handsome—quite superb, Mrs. Temple thought—as she rose to meet her mother. But there was discontent in her face.

“Sibyl dear,” the mother said, “your taste is nothing short of perfect. This drawing-room grows lovelier every day. Where did you pick up that little picture?”

“In Bond Street,” she answered listlessly.

“You paid a price for it, I can guess?”

“I know nothing about prices,” Sibyl answered haughtily.

“And never need,” replied her mother quickly. “Happy girl!”

Sibyl made no answer.

“I have come, dear,” her mother now said, “to ask your assistance in a very delicate matter. Prendergast wants to marry Sophia.”

“Sophia will not marry at present,” Sibyl remarked.

“Not unless we are very judicious. But with management she will. Prendergast is a man after her own heart, just the sort of man she would have fallen in love with if this ridiculous affair with Mr. Brent’s son did not stop the way. Now, Sophia must not pass this offer by. I am determined she shall not. Prendergast is very rich, and he is willing to settle down here.”

“And what of that?” Sibyl asked.

“What of that? Why, here you three girls will be in the one neighborhood, and that a pleasant one. Each will have a handsome establishment; and think how you will be able to put yourselves at the head of everything. You will soon be the leaders of the county; with your looks and your cleverness and your taste you ought to be. You

can have your London houses—you and Sophia immediately, and Car when those old people die. You can have your trips to the Continent, your entertainments at home—oh Sibyl! why had I never such a chance when I was your age? How I should have enjoyed the world!”

“You did enjoy it, mamma.”

“Now, Sibyl,” the mother went on, not noticing this remark, “there is one thing I wish you to impress upon Sophia; that is the comfort of riches. You can speak from experience; tell her how fine a thing wealth is. Impress it upon her. You might even say, for you know Sophy’s turn of mind, that you find yourself able to do so much good—to help the poor—charitable work—churches—anything can be done with money. That is my special charge to you, Sibyl; the next time you and Sophy meet tell her something of your experience of riches. Now, where is Archibald?”

“He went into the library after lunch,” Sibyl said, rather sulkily. “He wanted to read the *Times*.”

Two minutes later Mrs. Barbara Temple was confronting her son-in-law, Goldmore, who, with his newspaper laid across his knee, waited to hear what it was of which her shrewd face was full.

“Sophia has had an offer—at least it has been made to me—from Mr. Prendergast.”

Goldmore bowed his head, in a way which signified approval of Mr. Prendergast. Then he said,

“It would have been a good connection if—”

“If what?”

“If Sophia had not fallen in love with Brent.”

“Now, my dear Archibald,” cried Mrs. Temple, slapping her hands together slightly in her vexation, “surely you know better than that. Sophia has not given her

heart away ; it is a girlish whim, and we might safely leave it to cure itself, only time presses. Sophia must marry Prendergast ; I should die of chagrin if I saw another woman's daughter get him now. In this matter you can help me. You have weight and dignity, and you speak in a commanding way. Now I want you to press this marriage upon Sophia, from the point of obedience, duty, and prudence. You can tell her how much my heart is fixed upon it ; and you might say something about the blessing attached to those who obey the fifth commandment." Here our little mother coughed slightly, blessing being rather a foreign expression to her organs of speech. "Sophia is a serious girl, and will think of that."

"But, Mrs. Temple," Goldmore replied, "I hardly like to use such an argument with Sophia. From what I have seen of her, I should not for a moment doubt that her conscientiousness is much greater than my own ; and it seems rather hypocritical, and even oppressive, to urge upon the girl an obligation for which, as a matter of fact, she has a greater regard than I should have had myself. Besides, if she really loves this young fellow—"

"A lad without a sixpence, and without a prospect! Oh, Archibald ! you are not giving your mind to the subject ! Tell me now"—the little woman faced him like some warrior of argument—"ought not both men and women to regulate their lives with an eye to prudence, common-sense, and the main chance?"

Poor Goldmore ! Prudence, common-sense, and an eye to the main chance had been his laws of life ; prudence, common-sense, and an eye to the main chance had made him a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-pound man. His

own deities were before him, and he must do them reverence.

"You are a wise woman," he said. "I will do as you desire. I will talk over the matter with Sophia."

"Now," Mrs. Barbara Temple said, as her trim little chestnuts whisked her along to the residence of Egerton Doolittle, "I have secured Sibyl and her husband."

She checked off two fingers.

"I want three more. I shall get them; and then, Sophy dear, I think your future will be safe; and in years to come you will thank your poor old worldly mother!"

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH EGERTON DOOLITTLE GIVES HIS VOICE FOR SEVERE
MEASURES IN THE CASE OF HER THAT WILL NOT WHEN
SHE SHOULD

WHEN Mrs. Barbara Temple was ushered into Caroline's drawing-room, she caught sight of the young husband and wife sitting side by side on a sofa. Her coming was evidently unexpected, and Egerton, ejaculating "My gracious!" dashed out into a conservatory adjoining the drawing-room, while Caroline, composing herself, met her mother with just the smallest signs of momentary confusion. The little woman glanced at two love-birds perched side by side in a cage which hung over the conservatory threshold, and then she recalled Sibyl sitting in her lonely splendor.

"For some things," our little Pilpay remarked privately—"for *some* things a young fool is better than an old sage. But these are only the *et cæteras* of life; Sibyl has secured the grand thing, after all, and more of it than Car. Life is pretty equal."

"Caroline, my dear girl," she said, after a few casual words, "I have come this morning to consult you on a matter of the greatest importance. I know your good sense, and the energy with which you can act when you have decided what is right to be done. If it was not for you, Caroline, and your tact and judgment, I should be in despair."

With such insinuating preface she told the story of Prendergast's proposal; and after expanding in the most glowing style in praises of his person, character, and estate, she turned to the dismal topic of Sophia's infatuation for that penniless Australian boy.

"For this whim, this caprice, this idea, which is not worthy to be called an idea, she will actually sacrifice a man who is not only a man of family and fortune, but whose character is of the very pattern which she most professes to admire. I protest, Caroline, it will drive me wild."

"It certainly is unfortunate," Car said.

"And unless you co-operate with me, work with me, and work hard and wisely too, Sophia will lose the best chance in life she ever can have. I can do nothing without your assistance, dear."

"I shall do all in my power, mamma," Caroline replied; "but you must tell me what you wish."

"It was on my tongue, dear girl. You must have a conversation with Sophia—let it seem accidental—and say you have heard about Prendergast. Praise him a little, but that is not your particular point. Set before Sophy *my* delight at the idea of the marriage; the happiness it will give me; how miserable I shall be if it goes off. Sophia is an affectionate girl, and I believe would do a very great deal simply to show her love to me. Now, you must put before her strongly my feelings and hopes; for, indeed, dear, if Prendergast does not marry her I shall die of vexation. Now, go over and over this matter with Sophia. You know, Car, she is not like you—clear-headed, of sound judgment, seeing what is right at a glance, and firm to carry out her ideas. She is soft, yielding, tender-hearted. If I were you I should coax her a little, kiss her,

be tender with her; all that will tell with Sophy. Now I know, my love, I have given you a difficult task to perform; and nothing but my knowledge of your tact would have encouraged me to ask you to undertake it. But you will do it, and do it well. Sophia will marry Prendergast, and the praise of the affair will be yours."

The little mother had not said one syllable about Car's cleverness which was unmerited; but however astute that young lady might be, she was like an osier wand in the skilled hands of her mother. With wonderful enthusiasm Car took up the scheme; and not less wonderful was the simple obedience with which she resolved to follow out the directions that were given her. Independent and inventive as she was in herself, she yet learned her mother's words by heart, as faithfully as if she had been getting up a scene in a play. She did not insert a word of her own; and the more she showed her readiness to follow her mother's instructions implicitly, the more did that unrivalled student of human nature laud her quickness, her resource, her capacity for manœuvre and benevolent stratagem.

Presently Egerton looked in from the conservatory, giggling and blushing.

"I have heard all you have been saying to Carry," he said. "'Twasn't listening, I hope. Couldn't help it if it was, the other door being locked. Oh, Mrs. Temple! do you know I really think you must be a clever woman; I really think you must be. You seem to know everything and to manage everybody. I quite agree with you about instilling things into Sophia's mind. Impress upon her"—here Egerton teapotted himself, and with outstretched hand began to spout fluently—"impress upon her the tremendous importance of marriage. Tell her that marriage

is the sort of thing that must be done, you know. You can assure her from me that it is tremendously important. And you can tell her that my experience is that it isn't so much matter whom you marry as the thing itself. Do that, and the rest will follow. Of course I was not speaking of myself quite, you know, not altogether; for Carry is such a tremendously nice girl that I don't hardly know that I could have found another wife who would have made me so happy—at least, not without a great deal of trouble, you know. But, I mean, you are to impress on Sophia that, in a general way, it does not much matter whom you marry. And then, if she won't see it—well, I scarcely know what to advise." The stream now became intermittent, and Egerton began to show symptoms of wandering in his mind. "I was reading some book lately about a girl that would not marry somebody; and what her parents did was, they shut her up in some tower somewhere, and kept her on bread and water. But you see you have no tower at The Beeches. Still, you might try the bread and water. It is wonderful what diet does."

Off flew our elderly little Venus once more, charioted hither and thither on the errands and the mischief of love. She knitted her brows, she made her little gloved fingertips meet, she set a reflective mouth, and thus she conned over the state of her plans.

"Sibyl is to place before her the comforts and the advantages of wealth; Sibyl will do it well. Archibald Goldmore is to press duty upon her, and take her on the ground of the fifth commandment. I can see him now—slow, solemn, parsonic. Oh! if I had time to laugh over it, I should. And Caroline will work on her feelings; that will come best from Car, who has not much

feeling of her own, because Sophy will reason, 'Well, if Car thinks so, there must be something in it.' Interest, obedience, affection. Yes, it is not bad. And there is more to come. Sophia, Sophia, I shall marry you, without a tower, or bread and water either! Simply by tact, dear—by tact."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE RECTOR OF KETTLEWELL QUITE AGREES WITH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE

HER flying wheels next ceased their swift revolutions at the door of the rectory, and the little woman alighted with the step of five-and-twenty. She shook her head as she marked how the once brilliant flower-beds lay neglected, and the stone steps, formerly white as porcelain, were turning green with neglect. Dead leaves strewed the path ; the blind of the dining-room window hung awry ; whatever she saw told her that the enchanter Gold had moved off with his wand to other domains, and that his successor Poverty had already marked all things for his own.

"I should just like Sophia to see this place," our moralist said. "It would be a lesson for her." She spoke as solemnly as if she had been the pensive and didactic Mr. Hervey walking among his tombs. "A few months ago everything was trim, and shining with money ; now—and this is poverty, pious poverty !" she said, with inexpressible scorn in her face. "I hate poverty."

The door opened, and instead of the man-servant of other days, well-clad, well-brushed, and obsequious, there stood before her an ill-dressed girl, whose skirts, tucked up on one side and loose on the other, told of work hastily left. Mrs. Barbara Temple noted the red, bare arm and the dirty finger-nails ; she lost sight of nothing ; and all she saw turned into a moral lesson.

"I like to live," she thought, "but better be dead than poor."

As she was going to the library a whiff from the kitchen tickled her nostrils, but not gratefully.

"Soup, I suppose," she murmured again. "Well, I have not to eat it, so I need say nothing!"

The part she had here assigned herself was none of the easiest, and she must be discreet and guard her lips. Mr. Brent advanced to meet her, and tried to put on his old cheery smile, but the conspicuous failure made the attempt more dismal than a plain, honest sigh. Mrs. Barbara conversed with her usual spirit and gayety for a few minutes until the question came naturally.

"Have you any news of your son?"

"None, since the vessel was last heard of," he answered.

"At that time he was tolerably well."

"I liked that young man," she said. "I never regretted anything in my life more sincerely than having to abandon the hope of calling him a relation."

"Has your daughter abandoned it?" Mr. Brent asked, with a faint smile.

"How kind of you!" she thought—"you have said just the word I wanted."

"That question," she answered, "is one which I cannot reply to as readily as I should wish. We know what young people are; there is always a great deal of sentimentality about them. It amounts to nothing. In time it wears off. While it lasts, however, it makes their management difficult. Of course you are of my opinion, that the keeping up of this engagement, even in the remotest way, would be injurious both to your son and to my daughter. No good can ever come of it, and the sooner it is finally settled the better for both of them. Don't you think so?"

"I do," the poor clergyman replied.

He had no spirit left. Never a man of independent will, he was now reduced to a mere animated machine, worked in matters of this sort from the outside.

"My daughter has a wild, romantic attachment to your son," Mrs. Temple continued. "Now you can help me to put an end to this affair. You only can put an end to it, but you can do so."

"I can, can I?" he replied.

"Yes; tell Sophia that you do not approve of it, and that you consider it likely to be injurious to Percival, which it surely will be. Say with perfect truth also—you can—that you are tolerably certain that even if she remained constant to him he would not remain constant to her. Just fancy, Mr. Brent! a young man, at the most impulsive period of life, thousands of miles away, and with no hope of seeing her for years! Constant, indeed! Why, in a fairy tale it would be too absurd to be true!"

He sat before her, passive and receptive, agreeing to everything, promising everything. But, indeed, if the proud Sibyl, and the inflexible Goldmore, and the intellectual Caroline, had bent to her will, little wonder if our poor rector bent too, broken as his nerves and will were by the one terrible storm of Fate. Whenever she asked him, "Do you think so?" he answered, "I think so." Whenever she said, "Will you say so to Sophia?" he replied, "I will say so." And thus she faced him, energetic, full of plot and will, talking fast, and with frequent action driving her meaning home. An onlooker might have thought the scene a private mesmeric experiment, and Mrs. Barbara Temple the strong and resistless operator, and poor Mr. Anthony Brent the helpless subject around

whose volition and reason another mind was coiling itself in swift and powerful folds.

"So," said our little mother, when this task was done, "you are to set before Sophia the facts of the case, and its probabilities. You are to tell Sophia that Percival ought not to marry her if he could, and that, in time, he would not marry her even if he ought"—"Interest, duty, affection, probability. Sophia, I shall hem you in, and force you to yield!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE PLAYS THE PART OF
MRS. SOBER WITH GREAT SUCCESS

PRENDERGAST remained to be moulded, and our strategist took care to have an interview with him before the great event of his proposal came off. For this dialogue she assumed a specially grave, not to say pious, air as she now fully understood Prendergast's habit of mind.

"It is a serious matter," she said, in the voice and face of her new character of Mrs. Sober. "Yes, marriage is a serious matter."

To this sentiment, of which the force, like that of many a popular sermon, lay rather in the delivery than the matter, Prendergast assented and business began.

"You are going to propose to Sophia?" she said, in confidential tones ; for indeed they had chatted the affair over several times.

"I am, with your permission."

"Very well. Are you above taking a hint?"—she paused here for the most engaging smile, made up of self-confidence, self-depreciation, and a coquettish consciousness that all the charms of sex had not yet forsaken her—"are you above taking a hint from a withered old woman?"

"You must be going to take me to consult some elderly friend of yours," he answered, with successful raillery.

"Capital! capital!" she cried, forgetting Mrs. Sober, and clapping her hands. "Oh, Prendergast! I do wish you would be more like that all the day round! It becomes you vastly. Oh! I shall make something of you, too—in time!"

Grave Prendergast could stand this no longer. He burst into a laugh, which our little mother merrily echoed, until she again remembered that seriousness was her part to-day. Turning as solemn as a Quakeress, she asked,

"But, seriously, will you take a hint?"

"Seriously, from you I will take as many hints as I get."

"Well, then, remember this: Sophia is a girl whose head is full of the idea of usefulness and activity, and being elevated, and elevating others, and—you can finish the sentence better than I, for you hear more of that sort of talk. I am not saying anything against all that. In its way, and at proper times, it is very well; but I maintain, and always have done, that it is not the thing a woman should live for. Just fancy, my dear Prendergast, what a whole world full of serious people would be! Serious people and nobody else! Really, I believe you serious people would want a few of us sinners back to tickle you a little! But this is not my business. We must take Sophia as she is. She has not grown up in the way I expected, but she is a good girl, and amiable. When *shall* I get back to my point? Sophia, then, being so full of these notions of service and aspiration and duty, and all the rest, in proposing to her you must fiddle on that string—I mean," said Mrs. Sober, withdrawing that rather flippant form of speech, "you must let her know that such is your view of life also. It is, is it not?"

"It is," Prendergast answered, divided quite between

sincerity and amusement at the singular little idol that chatted away before him.

"Then be careful you let Sophy know it. And, Prendergast, be careful, too, that you tell Sophy that you have a work in life—I suppose you have—and that she is the woman that can help you to perform it. Present yourself before Sophia in that form, as a man who has a work to do—such a work as she would approve of, such a work as she would do herself if she could. Tell her that she can give you strength, guidance, and all that sort of thing. This is the way such a girl must be carried. We none of us like to be thought mere dolls, dressed for your drawing-rooms, and least of all do girls like Sophia like it. Tell her you will go through the world leaning on her, as they do in pictures, half supporting, half reclining. Tell her that you will draw inspiration from her eyes and from her character, and then Sophia is yours. Oh! I wish I had been a man, just to teach the rest how to propose to us!"

"Well, Mrs. Temple," Prendergast said, repressing his smiles with no small difficulty, "there is a great deal in what you say. And I can assure you that whatever woman I proposed to, or thought I should wish to propose to, I should meditate something of the kind."

"If you really mean it," she said, "it will come a great deal better. It always does."

"Surely you would not have me say what I did not mean!"

"Fudge! Prendergast, to put it in that way! In love-making we are not understood to mean what we say. No more than a monarch on the stage is understood to mean what he says when he promises to bestow kingdoms on people. (He has two rooms meanwhile, which he means to keep to himself.) But in this particular case, if you do

mean it, why, of course, you will say it with more emphasis. Ah, dear me!" she added, resolved to efface the impression of her flippancy, "I dare say you are right, Prendergast, after all, and we wrong. But the world is so pleasant one can't help loving it."

She sighed this out so naturally that Prendergast reflected that there must be good in this merry old pagan after all; and he pleased himself with the thought that before she departed from human life she might rise to a higher mood and confess her follies. So our little mother showed admirable tact, for she gave the finishing touch to her pupil; and when bidding him good-by she asked,

"Now, Prendergast, will you say exactly what I have told you?"

He answered, "I will, exactly."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE REVIEWS HER CONDUCT,
AND THEN LAYS HER DOWN TO SLEEP

THE labors of the day were over. The whole assault had been planned. In her bedroom Mrs. Barbara Temple sat like a general in his tent the night before the battle. She was reviewing her forces, measuring their strength, settling the order in which they should advance.

"It is important, however Sophia may affect to despise it, that Prendergast's wealth, and what it will do for her, should be put before her fairly. I can trust Sibyl for that ; no one would manage it better than Sibyl."

She paused as her first company passed mentally before her to the battle. The array satisfied her. Then she fixed on the next.

"Duty—obedience. Sophia has always laid great stress on these, and not in affectation either ; oh no, she means what she says. Well, I think when Goldmore talks to her about a parent's authority—I *think* it will move her."

And so the second company marched past under the general's approving eyes. Number three came in view.

"Her affection for me is genuine. Dear girl !" the little mother said, with a warming of her heart, "she does love me ! Well, what then ? I love her, and I am doing the best for her. When Caroline tells her that this marriage will satisfy me and make me happy, I believe she

will yield. And Car will do that for me, and do it effectively. Oh yes, I trust Car."

And so company three went by, and was approved. Which was number four? Yes, she remembered.

"I wonder will Mr. Brent bear in mind what I told him? I think I shall drop him a line to refresh his memory and to bind him to secrecy. If he manages well he might accomplish more than any; but he may blunder—nay, he is the sort of man who will blunder if he can."

And so, warned by a little frown from the commander, company four went by. Company five— Oh! well she knew it: with this she was to conquer.

"Prendergast—Prendergast; he is my mainstay after all. Oh yes; he will touch Sophia at the very heart. And he will say all I wish. There is one thing about these serious people: they are half deceiving themselves and half deceiving others, and so they assume a most valuable appearance of earnestness. Now, I could not to save my life pretend to be interested in being useful; but I suppose I should be more telling in serious society if I could. Prendergast will sermonize about opportunity and duty, and Sophia will listen, just as she listens at church—I can see her now; and the woman who listens to a suitor like Prendergast is—married!"

And so the whole army was reviewed; the forces were irresistible, stroke after stroke; Sophia would be conquered at last.

"And now let me see," the little mother continued, throwing herself back in her chair as she pondered her own responsibility in the transaction. "I am a worldly woman; I am making a match for my daughter which is worldly-wise—nothing more and nothing less; I am doing all I fairly can to urge her to this marriage, pressing

her on by every means in my power. Well, am I wrong? Why, even on the showing of good people or romantic people, I am marrying her to a man who is in every way likely to make her happy, although she may not yet acknowledge it. He is good, upright, and kind. And then on *my* showing I am giving her a position in society, snatching her from a mistaken engagement, from years of waiting which are sure to end in solitary disappointment or in wedded poverty. Give me for my daughters a life well carpeted, well cushioned, well furnished, well dressed, and my head for it if in ten years' time they are not the first to say to the old mother, 'You were right after all.' Yes, the good people talk about doing right and not pleasing yourself; I do right—and please myself too. Sophy, Sophy, to-morrow night you will be engaged to Prendergast. I shall have done it; I have done it already. And if you drop a few romantic tears—why, tears are soon wiped off; but wealth, fortune, position—these remain from day to day and from year to year, and these make life, let saints and poets say what they please."

So, having settled matters with her conscience in this frank and fearless way, our little mother laid her down to sleep; and she slept that light, semi-conscious slumber common with those who know that upon the coming day a great triumph shall be theirs.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH THE STAGE-MANAGER FINISHES HER DAY'S WORK

By what complicated mechanism Mrs. Barbara Temple arranged all that happened on this day I must not tell. The description of her successive artifices would fill a volume. Enough to say that she had settled the speeches, the times, the persons, the places in every particular. The day was, indeed, occupied with the production of the drama of the spider and the fly ; and the powerful effects, the incidents, the plot, the traps in the stage, the risings and fallings of the curtain, all were done at the instance of that renowned dramatic authoress and stage-manager, Mrs. Barbara Temple. Having said this, I shall, without another syllable of explanation, tell you what happened. All that need be said, and this only for explanation, is, that she contrived, without any suspicious coincidence, to bring each of her subordinates into contact with Sophia between morning and evening of one day, and that the day when—still by her arrangement—Prendergast was to make his proposal. If I were to follow all the windings of this day, the shiftings of scene from place to place, it would be very tedious ; and, after all, what is my object ? First, to declare the foresight and contrivance of our little mother ; and secondly, to show how poor Sophia was environed with motives all impelling her to break faith with Percival Brent. These ends can be fully attained by the simple record of certain fragments of dialogue

which bore upon the great event of that memorable day.

I. SIBYL AND SOPHIA : MONEY *vs.* LOVE.

"Believe me, Sophy, marriage is a lottery. I don't think after a month is over love makes much difference."

Sibyl said this after the mention of young Brent's name. She was reclining on a sofa, looking very beautiful, but cold, proud, and with plain tokens of disappointment amid all her disdain.

"I can't believe that," Sophia replied. "You did not always think so yourself."

"I was not married then," Sibyl answered—"I am now."

It was on the tip of Sophia's tongue to say, "If a girl of twenty-two marries a man of fifty-three, is her view of marriage to be taken as the true one?"

Sophia did not mean, you may be sure, to ask this home-thrusting question in any taunting way, but quietly and reasonably. She felt, however, that such a question must be hurtful to her sister's feelings, and said nothing at all. This led Sibyl to believe that her argument was taking effect.

"Sophia," she said, in a stern way, altogether her own, "marry Prendergast. He is wealthy, good-looking, and his tastes are like yours. Now, ask yourself, are you not more likely to be happy with such a man, more likely to have your own way and please yourself, than with young Percival? Percival may forget you. If he remembers you he may be unable to marry you. If he marries you he may disappoint you as a husband. Just consider the number of chances which have all to come right before you have any certainty with him! And here is a man, of whom every one of your friends approves, and whom you

admit you respect yourself, making you an offer which I call a splendid one. Oh, Sophy! you can't refuse him! If you did," Sibyl said, growing more and more convinced even by her own argument, "you would be silly beyond expression. You won't disappoint us all, Sophy; you can't—I know you can't!"

II. ARCHIBALD GOLDMORE AND SOPHIA :

PRUDENCE *vs.* LOVE.

"My dear Sophia," Goldmore said, taking her hand, and speaking to her in a grave, fatherly way, and with intentions that were unmistakably kind, "I wish to say a few words to you about my friend Prendergast."

Poor Sophia turned red and pale almost in the same instant. A lecture from Sibyl was a trifle compared to this.

"I have known him more or less intimately for years," the elephantine magnate continued. He talked as if he were dictating a testimonial. "A more upright, honorable man does not breathe. He is charitable and humane to a fault. Believe me, Sophia, I would not open my lips to you on the subject if I did not in my soul believe that Prendergast will make you a truly happy woman, and that he is worthy of you. I can say nothing more in his praise."

Sophia began to cry, not knowing where to turn, and Goldmore, taking upon himself almost unconsciously the paternal relation, gently patted her on the shoulder. Indeed, it seemed as if affairs had only to be pushed a little further for him to bestow upon her a paternal kiss.

"Marry Prendergast, Sophia," Goldmore continued, repeating unawares his wife's concise counsel. "You are of course, free from all engagement to young Percivè

Brent. Remember, I have not a word to say of that young fellow but praise. Under the auspicious circumstances of your original engagement I considered it a happy event. And even when he left England, I thought perhaps things might turn out well for you both. Since then I have"—here he reflected on the interview with Mrs. Temple and her charges to him—"since then I have thought things over, Sophia, and I feel you ought to be—*prudent*."

"Prudent!" "Prudent!" It was the word that had been rung in the poor girl's ears until she was ready to scream at the sound of it.

"And besides, Sophia," Goldmore continued, "your mother wishes it. I am far from saying that any girl is bound to consider even her parents in a matter so nearly concerning her personal happiness; but, Sophia, when the man is so very desirable, and when a parent's will is so very strongly expressed, I think a dutiful character like yours will—will weigh the matter, Sophia!"

Sophia was really broken down now and sobbing piteously; and Goldmore, who would not have wounded her without cause on any consideration, judged that these tears were shed over the final wrench from Percival Brent.

"You are naturally agitated, dear girl!" he went on, in his three-syllable style of speech. "You are of a sympathetic nature, and you regret your late engagement. You are one of those women who are always delicate in your dealings with our sex—more delicate, perhaps, than most of us deserve. But, now that the thing is done, every hour your sorrow will diminish, and your future will grow brighter. Don't cry any more, Sophia; you are acting prudently, and you have obeyed your parent."

III. CAROLINE AND SOPHIA : LOVE *vs.* LOVE.

"Mind, Sophy," Car said, "if Prendergast was an elderly man like Goldmore I would not have had you marry him, not if he could have heeled your boots with diamonds. Don't you see how dull Sibyl is? It is nothing in the world but that she is tired of that old fellow. Now, you may not think Egerton very clever or witty; but I assure you he is a capital husband, and I have grown fonder of him than I could have believed. I would not see you so moped as Sibyl, not if mamma were to go on her knees to us. But, really, Sophia, Prendergast is more than passable—he is very agreeable."

"Well, but being agreeable does not make you love a man," Sophia ventured to say.

"No," Car answered readily; "but when a man's character is such as you approve, and when his position and prospects are good, and when he is agreeable in addition, you are safe in marrying him—safer, do you hear, Sophy? than you would be in marrying after the most romantic of courtships."

Sophia was silent before Car's reasonable assertion.

"Besides, Sophia"—now she came to her special appeal—"mamma is quite in terror lest you should refuse Prendergast. She has taken such a fancy to him. With his serious ways one would hardly have expected that, but so it is. Prendergast will be making mamma a saint one of these days if he enters the family, he has such an influence over her."

It was not altogether fair in Car to hold out such a motive to her sister. She well knew how Sophia bewailed her mother's infatuated worldliness; and how, in her gentle, daughter-like way, she was always trying to make

her mother less of a pagan and a mocker. This one sentence of Car's told more with Sophia than all that had been said to her before. She was in that melancholy mood when women, and men, too, often make life-long sacrifices at the bidding of religion. What if Prendergast did really make her mother in her last days a better and a wiser woman! She sighed, and looked up at Car receptively.

"No doubt of it," Car said, in a kind of reply to her sister's glance. "Mamma will be the happiest woman in England if you marry him. And she has been a kind mother to us, and we ought to please her if we can. And besides, as I said, he may really be useful to mamma, she thinks so much of him."

Divided was Sophia's heart, and her loyal will was shaken when she left her sister. Who could stand such a succession of argument and appeal? or, if we choose to bring in a new metaphor, what citadel could resist such a number of battering-rams, managed by that eminent pagan military engineer, Mrs. Barbara Temple? Yes; Sophia was feeling the weakness of her sex: "*I faint,*" "*I yield.*"

IV. EGERTON AND SOPHIA: IDIOCY *vs.* LOVE.

As with sad, slow steps she was walking down the avenue, she was startled by the apparition of Egerton, who suddenly appeared, peeping over the top of a holly-bush. He glanced apprehensively round, like a paid assassin in a tragedy, and then, coming round the holly-bush, with long, secret, Tarquin strides, he advanced to Sophia's side.

"Come here," he said, in an awful whisper.

And he returned behind the holly-bush as he came

forth. Sophia did not know what to think ; but, waiving his manner in her estimate of the position, she came to the conclusion that he had got a hedgehog, or some other natural curiosity, which he wished her to inspect ; so she followed him. No sooner was she at his side than, with three or four more furtive glances, he stooped to her ear, and, in a whisper of the profoundest caution, said,

"Sophia, take my advice, and go and get married. It's an awfully nice thing. You may take it from me that it is not so much matter whom you marry as the thing itself. Do that, and all the rest will follow. Don't let out to any one that I told you."

And then, with an air of secrecy which was frightfully suggestive, and the same long and ghostly strides, he made for the house, leaving her to resume her path as best she might.

V. THE REV. ANTHONY BRENT AND SOPHIA :
DESPONDENCY *vs.* LOVE.

"Miss Temple," the clergyman said, with a melancholy air, not the least feigned, although, by casting a gloom over his conversation, it greatly furthered Mrs. Barbara Temple's ends, "times have changed, changed indeed. I had a letter from my son two days ago."

How that good little heart leaped to hear it! Percival! he seemed near her once again, and she would be strengthened now.

"How is Percival?" she asked gently.

"Pretty well," the rector replied—"tolerably well, I may say. But he writes in bad spirits. Little wonder—his prospects are very uncertain. I don't think he will ever return to England."

"He meant to come back when he left," poor Sophia said, turning sick at heart, after her little gush of pleasure.

"That I know," the rector answered, in the same downcast tone. "But his intention will change, if it has not changed already. Percival has to face a life of struggle. I was very glad to find that you and he had quite broken off from each other."

"We wanted to act prudently," the poor girl said. Oh! how delighted she would have been had the rector, in the remotest way, recognized that an understanding existed between them!

"It was prudent," he continued. "To you such a thing could only have meant bondage and disappointment; and to him—well, Sophia, greatly as I like you, I don't really think Percival would have been so likely to prosper had he been still engaged to you."

"I could not bear the thought of injuring him," the poor thing said. She was on the edge of a fit of crying, but Mr. Brent, never a man of observation, and now quite occupied with his own cares, did not notice her agitation.

"I am sure of that," he replied. "Of course, that is why you so wholly detached yourself from him. It is better for both of you. Percival, as you know, has returned to the man with whom he resided when his health was delicate. This man—Warren—is getting advanced in life, and wants a helper in his business. Percival, I have no doubt, will get that appointment, for they are very fond of him—that is, I mean Warren and his daughter are very fond of him."

"Mr. Warren has a daughter, then?" Sophia asked.

"Yes, he is a widower, and she is his only child. I think—indeed, I know—that she was rather soft on Percy when he lived there. In fact, one or two rather unnecessary letters followed him to England. I laughed then; *now* I cannot but think that if Percival manages the busi-

ness well, and gets into the old man's good books, and— and marries little Bessie, as he used to call her—”

“He called her little Bessie, did he?” Sophia inquired.

“Little Bessie—that was the name,” the rector answered. “He always called her that. It meant nothing, of course. You see, they were a great deal together, and Percival says that in the colonies people are not so stiff as we are in England. He used to say he liked colonial manners. Well, to return—if he marries Bessie it might be a nice thing for him. Indeed, it will be his solitary chance in life.”

It was a sore, an aching heart that lay in Sophia's gentle breast as she and her mother drove home. The poor girl had not the smallest suspicion that her mother had arranged all these nice little thunderclaps, but even had she known it the knowledge could not have blunted the dreadful edge of the rector's communication. However powerfully her own friends had argued, they could not have affected her as Mr. Brent had done. It seemed as if the father spoke for his son. It sounded like a message from the lover himself, saying, “Let us part.” And in the mists of her fears and doubts the figure of Bessie Warren rose before her—at Percy's side, seeing him day by day, at the head of the household of which he was to be a member, wealthy, and fond of Percy—known to him by a pet familiar name. What chance had she against this fatal Bessie Warren?

Little Mrs. Barbara Temple was no tyrant, and would not have inflicted any useless pain on her daughter. She saw Sophia out of the side of her eyes as they drove home, and marked her misery, and felt really sorry for her; but it was sorrow such as a humane surgeon feels for the

shrinking patient on whom he is about to operate : it was all for Sophia's good. These tears would flow, and then be gone ; and after the dread and the operation, and the shrinking and the crying, there would be the world—the bright, prosperous world—wealth, fashion, ease, respect—all that station can secure and money can buy. Oh ! no doubt of it, she was acting the part of a wise mother. And so, quenching her last misgiving, Mrs. Barbara Temple made ready for the final, the winning stroke, in her grand matrimonial game.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BEFORE BEGINNING WHICH THE READER IS TO GUESS
WHETHER SOPHIA SAID "YES" OR "NO," AND THEN
READ AND SEE

MOTHER and daughter sat down to dinner. Sophia's face was full of care; but by some accident, or by the caprice of Fate, she was beautifully dressed, and looked very charming in her sadness. The beautiful attire was not, indeed, very surprising, for Sophia gave such particular attention to dress, and was, besides, such a "colorist," that I don't suppose she had an unbecoming gown in her whole wardrobe. To-night she wore a dress of pearl-gray with a tucker of white lace round the open front, and a garnet brooch, which I suppose she had pinned in by chance; but it was in the best taste. Indeed, if the poor, heart-sick girl had spent two hours at her glass, and dressed herself for rivalry or conquest, she could not have looked more lovely. Just as an accomplished writer when he is thinking least of form will throw off his most finished piece, so Sophia, who was a true mistress of the art of dress, did this evening, when her thoughts were far enough from the toilet, deck herself out in a way which most of all displayed her charms. Mrs. Barbara Temple marked her as she sat.

"When Prendergast comes," that keen-witted woman said to herself (having arranged that he was to appear accidentally after dinner)—"when Prendergast comes, and

sees you, if the sight does not unlock his lips he is not the man I take him for!"

Perceiving Sophia's melancholy air, the little mother assumed the same herself. She was taciturn, thoughtful, sighed, and in everything reflected her daughter's sadness. This was supreme high art; it was saying to Sophia, "If you are heavy at heart, so am I; I, too, am facing a great anxiety." And so effectually did she play her part that, towards the end of dinner, Sophia, rousing herself by an effort, tried to talk cheerfully. Mrs. Barbara felt a thrill of reasonable pride at this recognition of her power as a successful dissembler. Instead of feeling low-spirited, she was, in truth, highly excited in view of her approaching triumph. She felt that Sophia was in her hands. The pensive look, timid voice, and downcast eyes, all told one story to her; the girl had no resistance left. She would accept Prendergast that night.

No sooner had they got into the drawing-room than Mrs. Barbara asked Sophia to sing to her.

"Yes, mamma," Sophia said, looking at her wistfully. "I will sing or play anything you like."

This compliant speech meant, and well the mother knew it, "If you would only use me for your own pleasure how happy we both might be!" Mrs. Barbara Temple understood, but did not regard; she was bent on marriage.

Sophia sat down and began her favorite, "Oft in the stillly night"; and finely she sang it, the melancholy ditty serving as a vehicle for her own sorrows. Her voice was a powerful contralto, and, without at all exerting herself unduly, she was able so to occupy her mother's ear that Prendergast entered the room unobserved, and was standing beside Mrs. Barbara before she knew it. The little

mother gave him a sprightly nod for silent recognition not to disturb the song, and then, slowly turning her eyes from him to Sophia, and fixing them on her, she seemed to say, "Is she not a woman worth winning?"

And Prendergast met her returning look with a look of his own, full of tender admiration, which conveyed his thought in reply, and just then Sophia, ending her song, saw that Prendergast was behind her. Surprise, and some other emotion, sent over her face the loveliest blush surely that ever woman wore, and it seemed to spread until her neck was touched with its conscious hue. Prendergast read it as an omen that at last she had begun to feel kindly towards him, and he could scarcely speak to her for the pleasure he felt. And Mrs. Barbara Temple, who never in her life made a mistake, was ready to clap her hands.

"She loves him! she loves him!" the little conqueror murmured to herself. "See what management does! Oh! what a woman I am!"

Almost before another word was spoken Mrs. Temple's maid came into the room, and, advancing to her mistress, said,

"Please, ma'am, is the letter ready?"

"What letter, Jones?"

"The letter, ma'am, you said was so very particular, which must go by to-night's post, and which we was to be sure not to forget to ask for."

This was delivered in recitation style, like something got carefully off by heart.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, with uplifted hands. "How could I have forgotten it! Sophia, my dear, you must entertain Mr. Prendergast for twenty minutes or half an hour. It is an important letter, and

will take quite that time to write. How very stupid I have been!"

And, without a glance at Prendergast, the very stupid woman left the room, but not until she saw Sophia's blush return with deeper glow.

"Ah!" she thought, "now for a pretty scene! Oh! the merry days when we were young!"

When our little mother returned to the drawing-room, she saw Prendergast standing alone in the centre of the floor. His look told her nothing, but as she came towards him he said very earnestly,

"Mrs. Temple, your daughter is an angel!"

Victory! the little mother could have skipped on the carpet for triumph; but recollecting that it would not be business-like to seem too much delighted, she restrained herself, and said,

"I see. She has accepted you."

"No, she has not."

"Yes, yes; but that is only a girl's way; virtually she has accepted you, and you know it."

"Mrs. Temple, she will never marry me."

"What do you mean?" The shock was great, and Mrs. Temple found it hard to speak.

"Simply that your daughter has explained to me her position and the state of her affections. She has been so kind, so frank, so like all I thought she must be, that I am more in love with her than ever. But I know the truth, and will no longer struggle against it."

He dropped his head on his breast, and said no more, and for nearly a minute even the nimble little tongue and versatile little brain of his hostess was at fault. But she collected her spirits.

"Prendergast," she said, in a tone that was dry and even contemptuous, "that is not the way to win a woman like Sophia."

"Perhaps not," he answered; "but it is the only way that I can follow." Even she was for the moment dumb, and he became silent again; but he roused himself, and spoke afresh, "The fact is, I have been rebuked to-night. Ten years ago I loved a woman something like your daughter, and she died before our marriage. Over her grave I vowed to live for her memory, and that vow I kept until this year. And to-night, as Sophia was speaking to me, it seemed as if my own buried dear one came from her abode of happiness and bade me—"

"Prendergast," Mrs. Barbara Temple said, with pointed acrimony, "the bell is near you. Will you ring for tea?"

It will be admitted by everybody that, from Mrs. Temple's point of view, her situation was decidedly irritating. She was angry with Prendergast, and bitterly angry with Sophia. To a plotting, planning nature like hers nothing is so vexatious as a failure such as this. She was working for Sophia's good; she had arranged everything so as to insure success; at the last moment Sophia stupidly spoils all! Wicked was the look with which she regarded her daughter, when, after Prendergast's departure, Sophia shyly stole into the room and took her seat at the tea-table. Mrs. Barbara instantly opened fire:

"So, Sophia, Prendergast has proposed to you?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And you have accepted his offer, of course?" The little woman put the question in this way, with a kind of concentrated viciousness which made Sophia tremble.

"No, mamma," the poor girl said, doing what undoubtedly was wisest at the juncture and breaking into sobs. "I could not, mamma—I could not marry him!"

"Sophia!" the mother said, rising from her seat and standing before her daughter, "you are a weak girl. I don't say you have done wrong, but I say you are a weak girl. Weakness of all things I hate. Sibyl would not have acted in this way. Caroline would not. You have neither sense nor spirit; and it is mortifying to me to think that the daughter who is least like myself, and least dutiful, is the one with whom I must, I suppose, pass the remainder of my life."

This was a most unkind speech; but we must remember how bitterly the little woman was disappointed; and we must remember, too, that she did not often lose her temper. Sophia, who might, perhaps, at another time have defended herself, was really broken down by the succession of the day's excitement, and only sobbed the more. Her mother's last sarcasm had wounded her indeed.

"I don't care for crying," the mother went on, quite forgetting her better self and her own maxims of self-possession. "Really, Sophia, if you are so determined to have your own way, have the courage too, and don't stand whimpering there. You can disobey me. You can fly in the face of everybody who cares for you. Then do carry it out. I had rather see you in a passion than as you are. Has anybody injured you? Have you not done as you wish? If you had accepted Prendergast against your will there would be an excuse for this pettishness and nonsense; but here you have had your own way, and now you must cry over it. It is all weakness—weakness—despicable weakness; and weakness—weakness—weakness"—she repeated the word in successive sallies of annoyance—"I hate and despise!"

Weak and strong they certainly looked. She with her compact figure braced and erect, her stretched-out hand,

her declaiming attitude, her clear, resolute voice ; Sophia bending like a willow, her face hidden, and one low sob following another in reply to her mother's taunts as they fell on her ear. But before the morning dawned Mrs. Barbara Temple got a lesson which led her to recall her bitter words and to confess that the strength was not so entirely her own, nor the weakness so entirely her daughter's, as she imagined just now, while she was standing mistress in her own drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHICH DISPLAYS SOPHIA IN A CHARACTER THAT MAKES
A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN BEAUTIFUL INDEED

THREE weary hours dragged by that night before tired Sophia fell asleep, and sleep had no sooner closed her eyelids than she was aroused. A low, intense whisper, which even in the moment of waking she felt to be charged with terror, broke her short slumber.

"Sophia! Sophia!" she heard her mother uttering in her ear.

Wide awake in an instant, and alarmed by the way in which her mother spoke, she sat up in bed. Mrs. Temple was standing beside her in her night-dress, and, by the dim light of the lamp which burned in her room she saw that the old woman's face was almost lifeless from its expression of intense alarm.

"Mamma! mamma!" she cried out. "What is the matter?"

"Hush! hush!" the mother answered, motioning her not to speak so loud. "If we are heard we shall be killed."

"What is the matter?" Sophia asked again, now almost as terrified as her mother.

"There are robbers in the house," Mrs. Temple answered, gasping for utterance. "Come here—softly."

She motioned Sophia to the door, and, stepping out on the landing, bade her listen. All was dark and still, and

for a moment Sophia either heard or thought she heard her mother's heart thumping against her side. But the house was perfectly silent.

"It's nothing, mamma," Sophia said at last, beginning to speak in her natural voice. "You made a mistake."

"Hush!" the mother cried, in the same terrified whisper as before, "I heard them in the house. I tried to ring the bell in my room, and I find it won't work. It was quite right yesterday. This is a planned robbery. The servants are in it. We shall be killed, Sophia—murdered. Oh! what shall I do?"

And now, indeed, Sophia, straining her ears to listen, did hear a strange sound below-stairs, and, bending over the balustrade, she plainly saw one gleam of light hastily vanishing, as if a lantern had for an instant been turned in the wrong direction. Nearly dead with fear, she listened again, and soon after sounds in the entrance-hall, as if a heavy box were being cautiously moved, convinced her that her mother was not wrong. She took the old woman's shaking hand and led her back to her own room.

"We must try my bell, mamma; we must ring that. The noise will frighten them."

"Try it! try it!" the mother answered. She could hardly articulate, and the words came from between her motionless lips as if she had not uttered them.

But when Sophia tried her own bell, the result was simply that the wires pulled lightly and no sound was made. These, too, had been put out of order.

"I knew it!" the old woman gasped. "The servants are in it. We shall both be murdered here, in this room."

And, in truth, the position was frightful enough. Their windows overlooked the garden, and to open these and cry for help would have been not only vain, but would

have added danger to danger. Mrs. Temple had sunk upon the bed, and in the paralysis of terror seemed to be losing consciousness, and Sophia, although she tried to keep her senses, felt as if she herself would swoon away.

"There is nothing to be done," the old woman said. "We must wait till they come and kill us. Oh, Sophia! Sophia! can't you do anything to save me?"

It was surprising to see how utterly prostrated with fear the active, energetic woman had become in a few moments. And Sophia, the quiet and delicate girl, was even now growing more collected. She remembered that the former owner of the house had erected in one wing a kind of belfry, with a bell of sonorous tongue hanging in it; for he was a nervous householder, dwelling in fear of thieves. The girls knew this belfry—so they called it—well, and had more than once rung the bell in the daytime in sport; and now Sophia thought that, if she were only there, she might easily raise such an alarm as would effectually frighten away the robbers. But how to reach the belfry? The only way was across the very hall where the robbers were now at work. Sophia could not make up her mind to go even a step down the stairs; and as to consulting her mother in her present paralyzed state, that was altogether useless. She stood irresolute, herself almost losing her senses with fear, but neither moving nor speaking until the old woman called out again,

"Sophia! Sophia! can't you do anything to save me?"

This appeal had a wholesome effect. Nerving herself by an almost superhuman effort, the brave girl replied,

"I will try, mamma; but you must stay here."

"Not alone, Sophia," she answered. "I dare not stay alone. You shall not leave me."

"I must, mamma," she replied. "I must leave you."

You can lock your door behind you. I don't think they will come upstairs. Quick! follow me and lock the door."

She stole out, and her mother rose up and went after her. Just as she was going out the old woman caught her hand again.

"Sophia, you must not leave me; I shall die before you come back."

"Lock the door," Sophia whispered again. And her mother heard her; for, as she stole into the dark passage, the door was softly shut upon her, and the key was turned.

It was a truly frightful situation for the girl. Nearly mad as she was with fear, she yet gathered up courage—how, she knew not—to steal a few steps downstairs. And now the noises in the hall were quite audible, and again she was just about to fly back, and take her chance in her own room with her mother. Just at this juncture a little bit of courage seemed to kindle in her breast, and she waited a moment, and then stole three steps downstairs. Here, at the turning, she saw plainly that there was light in the hall; and somehow the sense that she was in the darkness and the robbers in the light gave her a sensation of returning security. She listened, trembled, and then, with shaking limbs, ventured three steps down the second flight. She could distinctly hear the burglars talking, and as one of them gave a low, brutal laugh she shuddered to think what wretches were near. Sophia always declared that the next few steps she took unconsciously, and that she only knew herself when she found she was peering from the dark angle of the stairs into the hall.

Three men were there. It was evident that they had mistaken an old oak chest which stood against the wall for a depository of valuables, and this they were now trying to force open. They were quite occupied for the moment,

and from her dark angle Sophia could plainly observe their movements. It was curious that now, when fear might altogether have overcome her, she began to feel a renewal of courage. She looked across the dark hall to the passage on the other side which she wished to reach, and she resolved, while the robbers were still engaged upon the chest, to make a dart across. Several seconds she waited, until she saw an opportunity, and, while the men were trying to force the oaken lid, she flew across the hall, and was in the passage on the other side, hidden from view.

But now, as she slowly groped her way along the passage, a new terror arose. What if the belfry door should be locked? The room was never used, and it might well be that the key had been taken away. The bare idea so terrified her that she scarce dared to creep to the door, lest her fear should be verified. But there was no returning, and the next moment she felt the door, and finding the handle she turned it, slowly, and to her unspeakable joy the door opened at her touch. Oh! what a rush of relief she felt! Her position might still be perilous, but the greatest danger was past. She crept round the wall, feeling her way until her hands touched the bell-rope; and then, drawing a breath for the effort, she pulled hard and fast, and immediately the iron tongue overhead began to answer her back in tones that seemed to tell that she was once again in communication with the honest world outside and need fear no more. Stroke after stroke the bell sent its resonant alarm out upon the midnight; and at each note Sophia tugged with fresh energy, and the faithful bell above seemed to grow more vehement as she, with gathering strength, applied to it for help.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A VERY SHORT CHAPTER; BUT IN IT THERE MEET THE BROOK AND THE RIVER OF THIS STORY

THIS passage, the only morsel of sensation in our boudoir story, has been dismissed as rapidly as was possible. Indeed, it would never have been told at all had it not been a link in the chain of incident on which the history depends.

Of course all Kettlewell applauded our Sophia. Her midnight descent, her flight across the hall, her plucky behavior at the bell-rope—everything she had done was praised. The burglars fled at the first peal, but Sophia kept on ringing until all the neighbors were aroused; and then such a congregation of servants and others had gathered in the house and grounds that fear was not to be thought of. All of us applauded her quickness of thought about the belfry; the only person who spoke in anything like a qualified tone being Egerton, who remarked that he was far from wishing to cast a slur on Sophia, but still he must say that she would have made a great deal more noise if she had used the Chinese gong which stood in the hall. For sounding an alarm, Egerton said, there was nothing like a Chinese gong. Sophia, in the gentlest way, but with laughter trembling on her lips, pointed out that the gong stood just where the robbers were working; upon which Egerton retorted that he had not said anything

about where it stood, but only that for sounding an alarm there was nothing like a Chinese gong.

Now, how would you have expected the little mother to have acted? To have denied her own abject terror, and attenuated Sophia's bravery? She did nothing of the kind.

"I was dead with fear," she said, in her own gay way. "Courage is not one of my virtues. I could no more have gone down those stairs and past those dreadful men than I could raise that piano with my finger. Deuce take my heart!"—sometimes, in her easy moods, she would let fly an expression of this sort—"I thought it would never beat again! And Sophia was as cool as if she were going down to see a visitor. Sophia ought to be a soldier's wife; she ought to be a soldier herself. Few women would have acted as she did that night. Really, I would not have believed she had it in her."

One happy result for the poor girl was that her mother's wrath was not so much appeased as effaced. The whole Prendergast incident was for the time forgotten, and when Mrs. Barbara Temple's mind reverted to the matter she admitted to herself that in charging Sophia with weakness she made a great mistake. She still deplored the issue of the affair, but she never again reproached her daughter, and she even made one or two indirect apologies for her severity of speech, and these we may be sure Sophia was only too willing to accept.

And now there began quite an era in Sophia's life. Her lover was absent, and they were not allowed to communicate with each other, for on this point Mrs. Temple never relaxed. She was not formally engaged; indeed, she was understood to be open to an offer—a fact which her mother, still following her original policy, took care to publish

abroad. Caroline and Sibyl now fully agreed with their mother that Sophia was acting recklessly in allowing the freshness of her youth to pass away under this blighting romantic spell. And all this time, only by the merest chance—seldom—perhaps never—could she hear anything of Percival Brent. He might be untrue; and even then, according to the words of their agreement, she could not reproach him with inconstancy. It was a trying time for her, but during this period her character was formed; and she, who on her fiftieth birthday was with general consent and delight styled “Lady Beauty,” learned her secret of charming in this period of anxiety and waiting, when her constancy and her patience were so severely tried. I here relate the main incidents of this uneventful period, and having at the same time tried by touches here and there to give you an idea of the maturity of charms towards which Time was bearing our dear heroine, I shall be able very soon now to tell you how it all ended: whether Percival was true or false; whether or not happiness of the kind she expected rewarded the constancy of her pure, glowing, and yet never impatient affection.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH THE WEALTHY MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE DISCOVERS SYMPTOMS OF BANKRUPTCY

DURING the weeks that immediately followed, Sophia observed that her mother was very often thoughtful, and would talk to herself, nod her head, shake it, frown, and make a number of those signs which denote that we are thinking hard and reasoning with ourselves. She never dropped the smallest allusion to Prendergast, and Sophia, glad of the opportunity, seized the favorable moments, and showered caresses and attentions upon her mother, which the mother for her part received with every mark of satisfaction. Thus the time, which, had it fulfilled Sophia's expectations, would have been one long scene of reproaches and regrets, did, as a matter of fact, glide easily and pleasantly by, giving another illustration of that great common truth, that if we only wait until our troubles actually come they will often turn out no troubles at all. Sophia, however, wondered what the moot case could be that her mother so pondered and argued with herself.

"Sophy," the little woman said one morning at breakfast, "this house is too large for us. I shall give it up, and rent a small one rather nearer the town. Our lease expires in September, and I don't fancy another winter in this lonely place."

So this had been the matter of internal debate. Sophia

was not at all surprised to find that her mother was giving up The Beeches, for the burglary was a sufficient reason; but when the old woman began to talk of reasons of economy, she concluded that, ashamed to confess to fear, she was excusing her flight by alleging pecuniary motives. Sophia, however, soon found that there was more in the matter than she had imagined.

"I shall keep one carriage in future—no more," Mrs. Temple said a few days after. "One carriage, one horse, and one man-servant. Quite enough for us two."

"Mamma!" Sophia cried; "the idea of you trotting about in a little brougham with one horse! How funny you will feel!"

"Not at all, dear, so long as the carriage is neat, and the horse what a horse should be. Quite enough for us, Sophy. More seems affectation—just like those Dones. Horrid people! with a fresh carriage for every day in the week—and such horses! It strikes me that whenever a vulgarian makes money and retires, being of no family himself, he resolves to have horses with a pedigree. No, no, Sophy; we shall not lose anything by living quietly. Leave that to me, dear; you may safely leave that to me."

Great was the astonishment of Kettlewell. Not that we wondered at Mrs. Temple giving up The Beeches: with us, as with Sophia, the burglary was a sufficient reason for that. But when she chose a small box of a villa near the entrance of the town, and put down two of her carriages, dismissed five of her servants, and in a general way reduced her expenditure by more than one half, we were surprised indeed. Had Sophia been married the affair would have been intelligible; but who, for any motive except necessity, ever heard of a match-making mother lowering her mode of living until all her daughters were set-

tled? There was a great deal of talk in Kettlewell, and a great deal of whispering. Had Mrs. Temple been living beyond her means? Had she made some bad speculation? Was this only the prelude to a final crash? All these questions were asked freely, and most of us had some surmise to make; but nobody quite agreed with anybody else, except in one point: Mrs. Temple was not the woman to retrench without urgent reasons; and, after all, the most likely reason was that she had not the money to maintain her original grandeur. One spiteful lady friend congratulated her ironically behind her back on having married two daughters well, at all events, and said that, even if the mother died a bankrupt, dear Sophia would always have a comfortable home with her sisters.

Car and Sibyl were as much amazed as the rest, and, not daring to inquire of their mother, they beset Sophia with questions which she was unable to answer. Sibyl was especially searching for reasons why, her husband having directed her mind to the subject in his elephantine way.

"It is not for us," he said, pausing as he stirred his coffee—for they were at breakfast—"it is not for us to ask questions, but still your mother's conduct is unaccountable. If you could find out whether she has been speculating, or her affairs are involved, I might interfere with advantage—to your mother."

Goldmore, as he said this, cleared his throat and shifted his chin between his shirt-collar in an imposing way. The chin was very well shaved, and the shirt-collar very white and stiff, as is invariably the case with millionaires in the morning.

"I might advise with your mother," the great man added, seeing that his wife did not speak, "and tender her my aid."

Sibyl was really alarmed at this suggestion from her husband, who, as she well knew, was neither a meddler nor one who formed his opinions hastily. She hurried off to Sophia and declared her misgivings; and all Sophia could say was that there seemed good reason for fearing that something was wrong. But, Sophia added, she had already tried every possible means to find out her mother's actual position and motives, and had entirely failed.

"In that case," Archibald Goldmore said, when his wife reported this result to him, "*I shall call upon your mother myself, and introduce the subject. It is my duty to offer her my counsel. What can she know about business?*"

And he called upon little Mrs. Barbara, who received him with her usual cheerfulness. Goldmore was a favorite with her in his way.

"You know me well enough to be quite sure that I am no Paul Pry," the millionaire said. He seemed to think that there was magnanimity in his very mention of that character in connection with himself. "'I hope I don't intrude' is not often on my lips; for this simple reason—I *know* I don't intrude."

Little Mrs. Temple gave him a brisk nod and smile, and he proceeded, approaching his subject with slow dignity, as if he were driving the lord mayor's coach round a ticklish corner.

"We have been a little surprised—Sibyl and myself—at the great change you have made in your household; and knowing as we do your sound common-sense, we are sure there is a good reason for it. It is a great change," he added, looking round the small drawing-room, "although you have displayed your usual good taste here from—from—floor to ceiling."

"Yes," Mrs. Temple replied unconcernedly, "it is a nice little house."

"This has been a bad time for investments," Goldmore remarked, resolved to keep near his real business, "and expenses are very heavy. I have sometimes thought how little I imagined when I first married how costly my establishment would be." The old rogue lived to the full a third within his income. "I am sometimes frightened at expenditure, Mrs. Temple."

"Are you?" she remarked. "Now, I never am!"

"I am glad to hear it," he answered. "To tell you the truth, I was afraid that you might have found your own expenses a little in excess of your calculations; and to be quite plain with you, I came this morning to know if there is any business you would like to talk over with me. I know," Goldmore said, with the modesty of a monarch, "something about affairs. Now, can I be of any use to you? Can my knowledge of—the money-market"—this being a joke, he laughed a little—"be of any use to you?"

"Not any, Archibald," she said. "I always manage my own business."

"There is no difficulty I can clear up?"

"All my business is straightforward and intelligible."

"Then," said the baffled inquirer, "it only remains for me to say that I hope you do not consider my visit and my offer at all impertinent?"

"Quite the contrary, Archibald," she cried vivaciously. "Kind, most kind. No one in the world I would sooner have consulted if I had wanted advice. But I don't want advice, Archibald."

So Archibald Goldmore went home as wise as he came; and when his wife met him in the avenue, and asked him

if he knew everything, it was with some slight vexation he replied that he knew nothing.

"But I have my fears," he said, "and very grave fears. However," he added, seeing his wife's face fall, "don't be alarmed. If anything happens, we shall see what can be done." He spoke like a financial pillar; there could be no dreadful crash in the family so long as he stood unshaken.

Egerton and Caroline talked the matter over too, and Egerton said at once that his mother-in-law was going out of her mind; and deeming it his duty to prepare Sophia for the worst,

"I have noticed this coming on for months," he said to her, while she could scarcely look him in the face for laughter. "There have been many symptoms which I have been watching. I would not be frightened, Sophia — being frightened never does any good — but still, if I were you, I should sleep with a strait-waistcoat under my pillow, and then, if anything sudden happened, you could clap it on. Forewarned is forearmed, Sophia."

Thus, both within the family circle and outside it, the affairs of Mrs. Temple were discussed with great assiduity; but relatives, friends, and acquaintances were alike left in the dark.

The ordinary set of people talked the matter over, wondered, surmised, and then forgot all about it. But the family could not so lightly dismiss a doubt which concerned their own interests; and in the family the whispered belief was that the little mother, for all her shrewdness, had run into extravagance, and that poverty was now forcing her to retrench. Then came questions: What is her position now? From what source comes

her income? What will Sophia have when she dies? And these misgivings were the more anxious, because it was already known that a portion of her property at least would at her death go to her first husband's heir.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH SOPHIA MAKES LOVE BY DEPUTY, AND THE REV.
ANTHONY BRENT CEASES TO BE RECTOR OF KETTLEWELL

WITH all her seriousness, Sophia had never been what we call an ecclesiastical girl. The modern fashion of church decoration, and other customs of reverence and taste in religion, had not at that time fairly arisen ; but ladies were even then very active in church work. From this Sophia had always held aloof, greatly to the surprise of successive clergymen, who had marked her as likely to be useful in their parishes. To repeated invitations that she would become a district visitor or Sunday-school teacher Sophia had always answered "no," and she had never given any reason for this refusal. Whether she liked dancing, and feared that her pleasure might be restricted, or what may have been her reason, I cannot guess. Even when our rector tried to persuade her to help him her answer was still a simple "no"; nor could the merry little clergyman by any semi-jocose questioning extract from her a syllable more. He turned about and tried gravity and serious remonstrance, but with no better result. Accordingly, Mr. Brent was somewhat surprised when, about six months after his son's departure, Sophia asked him if she could be of any use to him in the parish or the Sunday-school. Of course he accepted her offer gladly. And a capital teacher and punctual visitor he found her. But Mr. Brent noticed

that at their various little meetings Sophia would manage to linger until the other ladies were gone ; then she would talk a bit, and somehow the talk always veered about till it settled on Percival, when Sophia would ask a few questions and be gone. Even little Mr. Brent, who was not an observer of things, sometimes felt that these two or three sentences about Percival were with Sophia the business of the day. At an earlier period of his career he would have broken many a jest upon this discovery, but jests were by-gones with our poor rector. The twinkle had fallen from his eye, and the blitheness had sunk out of his tone. A pallor was stealing over his face, and he was fast turning gray. As one of his parishioners, who made her living by laundry-work, said, "He looked like a gown that had been to the wash" ; the colors had run ; what remained was himself and not himself.

And now, disregarding for a moment our small chronology, let me dismiss the rector from this tale, where, indeed, he has little more to do. Poor Sophia clung to him more than most of his parishioners, and she found a real pleasure in his society, because it seemed to be a kind of remote contact with Percival. The bedroom where Percival had slept from boyhood was in that house. The books he had read were on the shelves. Here he used to sit at dinner. There was the garden-walk where he was wont to saunter with his pipe. She knew the very peg where his hat used to hang. Somehow he did not seem quite so far away when she was in the precincts of his own home ; and the rector's dispirited talk had a certain liveliness for her, because he was Percival's father. Occasionally, too, she would get a glimpse at her absent lad himself. For instance, one day, as they were walking together to the garden-gate, the rector said,

"Percy planted that rose."

Next week, as they went the same way, Sophia stopped beside the rose-tree to pluck off a few withered leaves and make the plant look trim. Mr. Brent, stopping with her, said in his abstracted way,

"I never told you: Percival planted that rose."

He never told her! Why, by that time she knew how many leaves were on it, and could spell its name and knew its prospect of life, having become for Percival's sake a perfect horticultural actuary.

Then another day the rector said listlessly—for he never joked with her about his son; and, indeed, seemed only to have a faint remembrance of that connection—

"I heard from Percy this morning; would you care to hear his letter?"

Sophia, who would have lived on bread and water for a week rather than miss one line her darling wrote, said, trying with miserable affectation to imitate the rector's apathetic tone,

"Yes, if it is not troubling you."

"Perhaps," Mr. Brent said, "as you don't seem greatly to care for it, we need not read this one, but wait for the next."

He said this quite innocently, but he put Sophia in a dreadful fix. With the instinct of true generalship, however, she resolved to recover her lost position by a bold stroke.

"I would not miss hearing it for the world," she said audaciously. "Oh! do read it."

And the rector, looking up with a faint smile, like a man who remembers something, took the letter out and read it through.

In none of these letters did Percy mention her name,

until three years after his departure, when one day the rector read this line : "*If ever you see the girl who was once my little Sophia, give her my love.*"

He read it mechanically, as he did everything now; then, holding the letter with loose fingers, it slipped from him and skimmed down under the table, and presently he was called from the room. Sophia dropped on her knees, and caught the sheet up, and read the line again :

"*If ever you see the girl who was once my little Sophia, give her my love.*"

Bless me! how she kissed that sheet! It got all the love-kisses that had been ripening on her lips for six-and-thirty months. Had it been the age of transformation, that sheet would surely have turned into a lover under the transmitting power of those kisses. And then Miss Sophia, who had a terribly tender conscience of her own, looked at the letter, and colored up at a certain suggestion of her own mind, and wondered would it be very wrong, and would the rector ever find it out, and was it very mean of her to do it in the hope that he never would find it out? And, deciding on action, she nicely tore off the finest little morsel of the paper, where on the last line these precious words were inscribed; and she slipped the shred into her watch-case, where she could look at it night and morning. "*The little girl that was my Sophia.*" "That is! that shall be! until you bid her cease!" she said a thousand times, as if that morsel of paper were his living spokesman. Truly, the girl was very much in love, and absence made her heart grow fonder, which is not usual with either male or female hearts, unless I see the world wrongly altogether.

About this time Sophia—and not Sophia only, but all of us—began to notice that Mr. Brent looked paler than usual, walked with a slight drag of the right foot, and

sometimes missed a word out of a sentence without being aware of it. Again, he would observe the mistake, and correct it with an appearance of irritation. "Brain mischief going on," old Sparking whispered. And he was right; for one Sunday evening, after preaching, the rector suddenly became speechless in the vestry, and lost his power of motion. He never spoke a syllable again, and even when he opened his eyes there was no reason in them. A dreadful storm of wind and rain came on that night, and blew the golden cock from off the church steeple, and some of the masonry with it. The tempest raged round the rectory garden, and uprooted two great elm-trees, and cast them across the lawn in gigantic ruin. Meanwhile the rector lay as quiet as if a summer breeze was blowing. There was no storm that could roar loud enough to disturb his sleep. And in the morning, when we awoke to see what the wind had done in our gardens and parks, we heard our kind-hearted little rector had departed from us forever, just while the storm was uttering its fiercest blast.

We said that we could have better spared a better man, looked grave a moment, remarked how uncertain life is, and then talked of the storm and forgot the rector. But to Sophia his death was a terrible sorrow. Somehow Percival seemed gone; she would hear no more about him, nor have the remote but still very actual comfort of talking with his father and seeing his old haunts. She had borne trials already, and other trials awaited her; but this was, after all, one of the sorest she ever felt. She grew lonely, sad, doubting; began to think Percy would forget her; tried valiantly to battle with her fears; cried many hours when she was alone, then wiped her eyes and went downstairs smiling; but it was an aching heart that beat

in her breast. And the body of the rector was laid to sleep in the church-yard; and his successor came. The king was dead, and the cry was, "Long live the king!" for we were all pleased with our new parson. He preached sermons shorter by five minutes than those of Mr. Brent. He kept two curates, good-looking bachelors. He worked the parish well. So we confessed every one that the loss of poor Mr. Brent was gain to us; especially these last few years, we said, when trouble overcame him, and this brain mischief had been stealthily making its way nearer to his vital part. Very soon the old rector's name was forgotten; but day by day and week by week we noticed that over the grave where his mortal part lay fresh flowers were strewn by some tender and unforgetting hand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN WHICH THE LIVES OF OUR CHARACTERS ADVANCE A LITTLE — SOME TOWARDS MERIDIAN, SOME TOWARDS SUNSET, SOME TOWARDS NIGHT

FIVE years had passed away since Sophia and Percival were parted, and Time had left its mark upon other personages of our story besides its heroine. Without any question Sibyl had greatly increased in personal attractiveness. Her dark, superb style was developed and heightened as she drew nearer to the meridian of life. No doubt the early bloom of youth was gone; but her form had become more finely rounded, and her carriage had become more stately. She was a beautiful woman of the world; no man ever looked at her face once only. But her manner had become more reticent than ever. She relied on her beauty for a place among her sex, and was at no pains to cultivate conversation, letters, or any branch of the art of pleasing, except the setting forth of personal charms. Had her manner and her talk been what you might easily have made them, she would have shone out as a beauty indeed in the prime of her womanhood. For Sibyl had no lack of sense nor of education neither; but proudly reposing on her incontestable loveliness, she rather withdrew than put forward her other attractions. Still, she could display herself when she pleased; on one occasion, I well remember, when she met in company a vivacious Italian, who was extremely struck with her appearance, and paid her a pro-

fusion of gay compliments. At last, his English failing, he tried to enhance his polite speeches by some poetical quotation in his own language, adding that he was afraid she would hardly understand what he had said. On the instant Sibyl answered him back with a return quotation, as I understood, from the same author. Not knowing Italian, I could not appreciate her readiness; but that the retort was lively and happy was sufficiently proved by the foreigner's delight. His eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"You know more than I do," he exclaimed, clapping his hands. "You are a wonder—a wonder, my dear lady!"

But Sibyl relapsed into silence, and treated her success with a sincerity of indifference which showed how lightly she regarded her mental achievement.

Car had, meanwhile, changed in a way the very opposite. She had grown thinner; and her frame, which was a large one, was more prominent. Car had gone in for intellectual ideas, and was improving her mind diligently, and was fast obtaining in our little town the reputation of being what is now called a woman's rights' woman. She had become rather too fond of talking in mixed companies on high subjects, and so fell into the very error her lively little mother had foreseen ten years before.

"As to Car," Mrs. Barbara said one day, "she is turning school-mistress. She talks lectures. I wonder she does not get a few lessons in action," the little satirist said; "it would become her drawing-room and dinner-table finely. Any actor or popular preacher could tell how to arrange her elbows when she is discoursing. I can't; for my education, dears, was neglected—in that particular department. We only danced and sang and flirted when I was a girl. Why, I remember once meeting a man who talked of Peru; and I assure you, dears, I thought it was

somewhere in Germany! But what matter? The world was ours, and we had only to live and enjoy, and make others enjoy. And we did it, girls; we did it! Oh! that I was young again!"

Caroline Doolittle, however, was not very popular in Kettlewell; and this was undoubtedly owing, not to her sound mental cultivation—which was as genuine as it was laudable—but to the mischievous habit she had of bringing her attainments into prominence. I suppose she did it to manifest her superiority over the rest of the women; but, unfortunately, the result was that while she vexed the women, which she did not mind, she repelled the men, which she did mind, very much.

One man, however, paid her the tribute of a homage which was as unceasing as the voice of a waterfall. Morning, noon, and night, Egerton sounded the praises of his wife. He had grown stout and healthy-looking, and he was as great a simpleton as ever. Indeed, his giggle had got new notes of imbecility in it, and was now a perfect wonder of vacuity in unarticulated sound. He had a slight drop in his lower lip, too; and a fixed smile, which might have made his very dog understand what mental weakness is in mankind. But Egerton adored his wife. They had three children now, and from infancy he pointed these children to their mamma as the sole model of excellence and strength. Egerton was very fond of nursing his children, and would walk up and down with them by the hour, telling them at brief intervals to look at their mamma.

"Tremendously gifted woman," he would say sometimes to his friends. Then dropping his voice, like Guy Fawkes in the conspirators' room, "Sometimes I see her reading for two hours at a stretch. I have timed her by my chro-

nometer. What would have become of me if I had not married that woman, I do not like to say. I *think*," Egerton would add solemnly—"I *think*, with my disposition and my way of looking at things, you know, I should have gone to the bad."

Egerton had also given himself up greatly to the study of cooking, and had a little room fitted up with a stove, and hung round with pots and pans. I think this must have been when the great Soyer was teaching us English people how to work wonders with soup and fish and fowl. In this room Egerton would concoct rare dishes, generally coming out with a very red face, and now and then upsetting a boiling saucepan down his thighs; on which occasions he would rush from the room shrieking, and declare that it was really too bad, and he would give the whole thing up. Egerton had an idea of working a reform in the present way of cooking red mullet.

"A delicious fish," he would say; "but under the present system it is sent up in paper—treated, in fact, as if it were a package. It is intolerable that a delicious fish should be treated as if it were a package."

Time, which was writing its record on our younger people, had not forgotten to pencil deeper lines on Archibald Goldmore. Visible signs of advancing years were upon him, and the elephantine firmness of his tread was going. He stooped; his hair was not so gray as once it had been. Goldmore—the wise, the sensible, the millionaire—was dyeing his hair to keep up the appearance of youth beside his lovely wife. Ah! lovely young women, what fools you make of us withering, elderly men!

And even the little mother, so long undying in her energy, began to show symptoms of decline. The light step was falling into a slower movement; the quick mo-

tions of the frame were seldom seen ; she was growing a little deaf, and every one observed it, though with characteristic vivacity she tried to hide the failing. She began to like quiet—bodily quiet—and would sit in her chair hour after hour ; but her mind was as active and her tongue as pungent as ever, and often Sophia would laugh till she was tired at the little woman's quaint remarks or droll stories of days gone by. She commented on everybody and everything with the same satire, sense, and absorbed worldliness as of old. Her two sons-in-law furnished her with abundant material for criticism, and Sophia often blushed to think how heartily she enjoyed her mother's caustic comments on Goldmore and Egerton. Both were favorites with the old woman, but Goldmore's mercantile stiffness and Egerton's feebleness of mind were too tempting for her to resist.

"I can hardly keep my countenance, Sophy," she used to say, "when these two men come in together. One I can stand, but both is more than mortal can." (They generally looked in after church.) "'Mrs. Temple, how do you find yourself this morning? Pretty well?'" She hit off Goldmore's voice to the note. "And then, 'Oh! how are you? tremendously warm day, isn't it? I do dislike a tremendously warm day,'" delivered exactly as Egerton would. Thereupon the little satirist would fall back in her chair laughing, and pleased to see Sophia laughing.

"Now, really, mamma, you are too bad!" Sophia would say.

"Not a bit, Sophy. You like it or you would not laugh. And, besides, why need the old man be a bore and the young man a blockhead? Oh! may the day never dawn when I do anything but laugh at a stupid or a fool!"

Still, Sophia was kept in wonder and fear by her mother's growing turn for economy. In some things she was becoming almost penurious, and the question, "What will it cost?" which once she disdained to ask of anything that pleased her, was now never off her lips. There was a positive alarm about her manner, too, when any new expense was in view, which was full of grave suggestions; and Sophia quite tried to reconcile herself to Goldmore's opinion that her mother had lived beyond her income, and was now trying to eke out her means. Besides, the old woman would sometimes, in a covert way, try to sound Sophia as to what she would do when left alone in the world, and once she actually asked if she had any idea of ever making money for herself. This uneasy question pointed only too plainly in the direction of the practical Goldmore's observation, that Mrs. Temple was living on an income that would perish with her, and that Sophia would be left in poverty. But beyond conjecture no one could go, for the old woman kept her secret, and would not suffer any interrogations. To Sophia she confided that she felt a little alteration in strength, but even to her she would not admit that the cause was old age.

"I am a little exhausted, Sophy," she said one day. "You see I have worked hard at enjoyment for a great many years. I shall do just what Johnson used to make our peach-trees and vines do at The Beeches. Let me rest for a few months, and next year I shall recruit, regain strength, Sophy, and be as lively as ever. Oh, Sophy! Sophy!" she cried, clapping her withered hands together with a sprightliness which, whether real or feigned, was equally amazing, "I shall enjoy the world—relish it—smack my lips over it, girl—for years and years to come!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH SOPHIA HAS HER PORTRAIT PAINTED IN PRINT- ERS' INK

SOPHIA was without question far inferior in physical beauty to Sibyl, and I think most people would have said that she was not so handsome as Caroline. Her features were regular, her nose straight and fine, her complexion delicate and rosy; but still, in her face she was no model of womanhood. Her expression—and what is expression but character fixed in the countenance?—made Sophia what she was. Her delicate upper lip, with a hint of firmness in its fine line, told of resolution; the soft hazel eyes, with their upward glance, had a look of aspiration; the mouth was full of tenderness, ready to mould itself to every affectionate feeling. And what was this after all? Sophia's nature in Sophia's face.

She was the best dresser I ever knew. Of color, either by study or natural gift, she was a perfect mistress. Accordingly, her appearance pleased numbers of people before they saw her face; and many a time, as she went down the street, the curiosity of those who walked behind was aroused to see what might be the face of the woman whose gown and mantle were so striking by the harmony or the contrast of their hue. Flowers, ribbons, brooches, all that sets off dress, she used with the most unerring taste. And she managed through all the changes of fashion to respect herself and her own figure and face; in the

fashion she always would be, but still she modulated it, so as to be the queen and not the slave. No doubt Sophia must have paid great attention to her dress, but I scarcely think she could have achieved such constant success, or so complete, had she not been a dresser born.

Then her manners in society were captivating. Here I think the little mother's homilies were useful indeed. With what a graceful attention she heard what you had to say! How modestly she gave her own opinion! She was well read, and could take her part in most conversations with ease; and now and then she could deal out a witty stroke. Indeed, Sophia had a great deal of humor, but seldom gave it the rein in society. Night was her time, with Car and Sibyl; and often the two more brilliant girls, as they laughed at her comical reminiscences of the day, would feel how easily Sophia could outshine them if she tried.

She loved the world. Here again the influence of her mother was perceptible, with this difference: that the world in her mother's language signified society and nothing more, while Sophia would have included in it the whole of nature and life. I do not think I ever saw any one who had such a simple and unaffected enjoyment in living as she. A walk in the woods was enchantment to her; and, on the other hand, I have seen her on the tiptoe of pleasurable excitement for a ball. She was no poetic recluse; she never shunned society or its pleasures, but rather sought them. There was not a particle of affectation about her; indeed, she retained her girlishness and her love of girlish amusements for an unusually long time.

And she certainly remembered her mother's teaching in another particular: she tried to please. She knew that

a woman ought to be an object of admiration and affection, and she ruled her whole life with this fact in view. But Sophia understood the art of charming, which, with all their gracefulness, few Englishwomen entirely do. Perhaps Nature feels that she has given our Englishwomen enough already, and, mindful of the limitation which ought to mark all mortal things, has withheld that one gift which would make them irresistible. Sophia knew that face and figure are not everything. She understood that it is the woman a man admires—not her eyes or nose or lips or waist; the whole woman—person, dress, manner, talents, and character. Frenchwomen are in this respect more far-sighted than our English ladies, but even Frenchwomen do not fully realize this great social truth. A woman who knows that her dress is tasteful and her expression agreeable and her conversation lively will be little dismayed to hear of crows'-feet round her eyelids or gray hairs on her temples. Her better part is blooming amidst the gentle decay of more material charms. You will laugh when I tell you, before the story ends, how Sophia Temple, Lady Beauty, at the age of fifty-three, had a new lover, and what a lover he was.

One touch I must add to this picture. Sophia was, in the best sense of the word, a religious woman. "Without love," cries a great novelist, "I can fancy no gentleman." A little diffidently I should add, "Without religion I can fancy no lady." Sophia's piety was in no way obtrusive, never puritanical, never ascetic, but gentle, animated, and humane. It quite saved her from her mother's narrow and heartless and merely sparkling worldliness. Sophia loved the world, but had a hope beyond it; and her religion gave a richness, a sweetness, a seriousness to all her charms.

I must admit, however, that many of Sophia's own sex declared her to be nothing particular. That men admired her was not to be denied, but women would often ask, dryly, what it was for. When I knew her well enough to take such a liberty, I ventured to say to her one day that, greatly as she was praised by our sex, her own appeared to decline to accept her as by any means representative. She laughed, with much gayety.

"Some of us," she replied, "admire in ourselves what is forcible and striking. I believe you said to me yourself one day that Lady Macbeth and some other eminent ladies of the imagination whom we remember make a sufficiently vivid impression to satisfy both sexes. You added something like this: 'I somewhat doubt if Lady Macbeth would be altogether a success in the drawing-room.'"

"What, then, is your idea of a woman?" I asked.

"I have drawn up a set of beauty rules," she replied, rising and going to her desk. "They will be the best answer to your question." She laughed, with great sportiveness, so that I could not tell whether she was jesting or in earnest.

So she gave me her beauty rules there and then. But these I reserve for the last chapter of this story, when, in parting with my readers and my heroine, I shall narrate two curious illustrations of her power to please.

I repeat, this story is written for the instruction of the tens of thousands of Englishwomen who can be like Sophia Temple if they try. Whoever of my fair readers will follow this amiable example shall be relieved of the anxiety of glancing over her shoulder forever, to see what brighter beauty of later date and fresher charms may be coming up behind. Youth and the attractions of youth need not be

despised by such a woman ; neither need they be envied. Her knowledge of society, her ways of the world, her familiarity with character—these, together with taste, refinement, virtue, and the desire to please, will give her the victory over time. Like our dear Sophia, she too shall be charming to her latest day.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONTAINS THE ACCOUNT OF A BOXING-MATCH WHICH DID
COME OFF, AND THE ORIGIN OF A LOVE-MATCH WHICH
DID NOT

PRENDERGAST, who resided not far from Kettlewell, had occasional opportunities of meeting the Temples; and it had been the little mother's expectation that he might renew his suit, and, perhaps, after a time, draw Sophia's affections to himself. He made no sign, however; and for long enough it seemed as if our heroine was to have no further trouble from mankind. But at last—at the end of the five years just mentioned—a new lover came upon the scene.

His name was Done. He was the only son of one Mr. John Done, a retired merchant of large wealth, whose antecedents were generally described in this way: that he had something to do with leather. The Dones were plain people, but not vulgar; and having resided in Kettlewell for twenty years, and being charitable and religious, they had gradually made their way into our town society. In fact, they were now received in companies where, at their first coming, they dared not have set foot. Still, it was never forgotten that Mr. Done was not altogether one of us. When any stranger would make inquiry concerning him the reply would generally be in this form: "Done is a worthy old fellow, and gives capital dinners. If you want a subscription for any good cause go to Done. He

is modest, unaffected, and not the least purse-proud. *In early life he had something to do with leather.*" This last clause was a formula repeated as faithfully as if it were a line of "God save the Queen."

The virtue of the Dones being not of Mrs. Barbara Temple's kind—piety and charity could not make her regard anybody with favor—and their origin and manner being plain, she had never liked them. Indeed, at home—she would not ridicule people in company—she would sometimes say to her daughters that nothing could ever be made of these glorified tradespeople. Then, with a characteristic dread of a too sweeping assertion, she would add: "Except sometimes, dears—except sometimes." "You know, girls," she said one day, in her gay style, "it is a proverb that there is nothing like leather; I don't think there is." She delivered this with one of her Frenchified faces of dislike, which always set the girls laughing. The plain Dones dreaded the witty, dashing, fashionable Mrs. Barbara Temple; and Mrs. Barbara Temple regarded the plain Dones with repressed, but not invisible, scorn.

There were John Done the First, and John Done the Second. As is very often the case with sons of self-made men, John Done, junior, while lacking his father's native sense and business energy, had inherited a double portion of his homeliness, made quite intolerable by a brassy assurance and a disregard of other people's feelings which, indeed, amounted to an anxiety to inflict pain wherever he could. At school he had been hated for a tyrant and a bully; and it was also known among the boys that he would tell a lie—and that not a school-room lie—when-ever it suited his game. Percival Brent went to school with him, being just three years his junior. Percival was a bright, merry little boy, very well put together, and

everybody's favorite; only that Done, who always disliked a boy in proportion to his school popularity or his educational promise, never lost an opportunity of tyrannizing over him. One day, when they were all in the play-ground, Done, in making a high jump, fell very awkwardly, and, amid the roar of laughter which followed, little Brent ran forward and made a pretence of smoothing the ground after the overthrow of the mighty Done. Exasperated by his fall, Done dashed forward and gave little Brent such a box on the ear as sent him spinning round until he fell heavily to the ground. Brent sprang up, all knit into compactness with rage, and tried to give Done a blow on the face, which he scornfully warded off, and told the little lad not to be so impudent again. But Brent, bristling and stamping with passion, declared he would have a fight for it; which Done at first refused, for all the boys cried out at the idea. But, as the little fellow would not be appeased, Done, having satisfied his honor by one refusal, and always liking to inflict pain, accepted the challenge, and the two stripped to their shirts and went at it. For several rounds little Brent was knocked all over the place; and they all felt for the game little lad, but were sorry to see him so punished, and especially in a hopeless fight. For my lady readers will observe that one of the crowning achievements in the noble art is to imprint your fist on your opponent's face. Now if your arms are only two feet long, while those of your opponent are three feet, it will follow that, while he may be merrily hammering your countenance into ruin, your return blows may fall on the unoffending air. This was what happened now, and poor little Brent was having a very dispiriting time of it. Some of the boys, however, noticed that he went down wonderfully easy; and others, who knew that

the rector's groom was one of the best pair of fists in the county, began to think that perhaps the little fellow had picked up some tactics from Bobby "Miller," and was trying a waiting game. Done thought so too; and being a large, mealy boy, with rather uncertain wind, he resolved to bring the thing to an end, and gave Brent one savage blow, which produced very disagreeable results on the poor little man's nose. Brent was not knocked out of it, however, as Done hoped, but the very opposite. He was strung together with fury; but even in his rage he did not forget the instructions of his master, Bobby "Miller." He rushed at Done; and while the other, in his magnificence, was guarding himself carelessly, little Brent "got in," and began to return on Done's face all the blows he had received, principal and interest. How those little fists flew and hammered! How Done retreated over the ground, wildly trying to get his adversary outside range again, while still little Brent drubbed away with astounding rapidity and vigor! The fact was, the little fox was quite fresh, while Done was thoroughly blown. Bobby "Miller" knew his business, and would have been proud of his young master had he been there to see. At last Done, nearly blind with blows and rage, made one grand effort to destroy his enemy with an appearance of ease. It was fatal to him. Brent was really warm to his work, and not likely to miss an opening. In rapid succession he managed to plant three blows just under Done's left eye, the last one delivered with such force that it sent the lumpy fellow to grass, where he lay vanquished, Brent standing over him, with fists still clenched, and burning, it seemed, for a little more. That was sixteen years ago. John Done, junior, was now a rather bulky young man, with a white, flat face, very small, sunken eyes, a smile

which expressed a narrow mind satisfied with itself, and unprepossessing manners. His habits, too, had not been the best, and it was known in Kettlewell that he was, in his sly way, a man of dissolute habits. He had now been absent, off and on, for nearly four years; but when he returned home he happened to hear of Sophia Temple and her little affair with Percival Brent. By a curious chance he had met Brent in Australia himself, and, although outwardly civil to him, he remembered, with a grudge, the thrashing of years gone by; for his nature was of that sluggish sort where revenge burns long and sullenly, like fuel in a slow-combustion stove. When he came home and heard about Sophia, the thought struck him what a nice girl she was, and what a fine thing it would be to marry the woman for whom his former foe was working now in another hemisphere! He pondered. His eyes lit with their half-animal gleam. He said, "I can manage it."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE DELIVERS A SERMON ON FLIRTING WOMEN AND ENCHANTED MEN

MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE was sitting in her favorite arm-chair, and the sunshine of a bright October morning was shining in the room. But that pleasant light revealed clearly the signs of time, which had for long enough been more or less manifest in the old woman's face. She either did not or could not any longer dress herself with the same deceptive skill as in days gone by, and now in every feature of her face any eye could see that she was an old woman—a very old woman indeed. She sat wrapped up carefully in a splendid Indian shawl, and a fire blazed on the hearth; and she looked cold and somewhat lifeless, although her eyes were still bright and her voice strong. Sophia, who stayed always with her, was reading the *Morning Post* to her, but the old woman did not listen with her accustomed attention.

"Sophy," she said at last, "I had a visit from Mrs. Done yesterday."

"Indeed, mamma!" Sophia replied. She bit her lip, and so hid a smile, spirited and contemptuous, with a dash of amusement in it. "And what does Mrs. Done want, mamma?"

"She says her son is in love with you."

"Delightful, mamma!" Sophia replied, now with open amusement on her face. "So he has thrown his handker-

chief at last. He may pick it up again, mamma, and put it in his pocket!"

"Now, Sophia, don't talk in that hasty, inconsiderate way," the old woman said. "In all those cases we should consider, dear; there is nothing like—"

"Leather, mamma!" Sophia cried merrily, catching up her mother's old, mocking phrase. The bright October sunshine and some whim of her own feelings had put her in good spirits that morning.

"Very pleasant, dear," the little mother remarked, shaking her head soberly. Somehow her whole style of speech was relaxing in energy; her words were pitched low; she did not speak with her former decision. Presently she said,

"You must remember, young Mr. Done was never in trade; and besides, Sophia, he will settle twenty thousand pounds on you!"

"Can't be had under forty, mamma!" Sophia seemed resolved to treat the matter in this jocular way. It was plain that she realized that she and her mother had changed positions; she was virtually mistress now; there might be argument, but no struggle of will.

"Sha'n't cry 'cherry ripe' under forty thousand pounds, mamma!" And Sophia tossed her head and looked saucy, and engaging and cheap at double the money.

"Now listen to me, Sophia," her mother said; "you will never have such another offer—from a money point of view."

"Well, mamma, I will be serious," Sophia answered, suiting her face to her words. "I would not marry that man for anything he could give me. To begin with, I know what his life has been."

"Now, my dear Sophia," her mother said, with a dep-

recating gesture, "I will not hear anything about his manner of life. The men are all in fault in that way."

("One I know is not!" Sophia tenderly thought, clasping her darling's memory to her heart.)

"All are in fault that way," continued Mrs. Temple. "Some let us know it; others manage to hide it. In fact, all are alike. And indeed, Sophia, better marry a man who, before marriage, has—has—*seen the world*, than one who will make you unhappy after. The wilder the bachelor, the steadier the husband, so I often have found it."

"Now, you don't mean it, mamma; you know you don't."

"I do mean it, indeed, dear; and, besides, whose fault is it if men are wild? Ours, my dear; ours alone. We are so fond of conquest and impression that we never leave them alone. We get them into the habit of mind, dear. Have I not watched women? More especially if a man is at all celebrated, we long to make an impression. All women do. My dear Sophia, the greatest prude that ever lived is pleased if she hears that a celebrated man admires her. Be he married or single, she will not care; she had rather have the tribute of admiration than not have it. Oh, Sophia! we are quite as much to blame as the men. We all like to have them at our feet; I liked it myself, dear."

"Mamma!"

"When they are celebrated, dear—remarkable—worth catching, you know."

"What is Mr. Done celebrated for?" Sophia asked scornfully.

"Money, dear. As good a thing as any other. Some men are conspicuous for fortune; others for looks; others for talent; others for family. But when a man is conspicuous for anything, women like to have his admiration,

and that is how half the men are spoiled, dear ; we do it ourselves. Why, even if a man is conspicuous for virtue, most of us would like to bring him to the ground—to have him sigh for us only once ; and then we can toss our heads and be as good as we please. Our vanity is gratified.”

“Now, mamma,” Sophia said, rather shocked at this speech, and not knowing whether her mother was serious or not, but resolved to treat it as jocular, “this is only your merry way ; do be serious.”

“I will, dear, if you will be serious too.”

“There—I am serious now.”

“Very well, then. Try and make up your mind to marry this young man. Twenty thousand pounds, Sophia !”

“Mamma, figures would not write the sum that I would marry him for. He is a vulgar, selfish, odious fellow. Marry him !” Sophia shivering as when some one walks over our grave. “Call *him* husband !”

She made a grimace which her mother could not have surpassed, and which clinched the discussion.

“Very well, Sophy,” the old woman said, sinking back in her arm-chair rather wearily, “you must have your own way. Only remember, dear, when I am gone, you had the chance of wealth and ease before I left you.”

The words alarmed Sophia afresh. She was certain now of what her future would be, but she put on a bright face.

“Never mind, mamma, you are not going to leave me yet ; and when you do, if all else fails, I can sew gloves at twopence a pair ; but I will not marry a man the very thought of whom makes my flesh creep. Oh, mamma ! mamma !” Sophia cried, relapsing into gayety now that her point was won, “for making you dislike an offer, there’s nothing like leather.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN WHICH SOPHIA'S EYES FILL WITH TEARS

FOR some reason which I cannot divine Sophia treated the proposal of the leather merchant's son as an affront. The matter oozed out—in Kettlewell everything did ooze out sooner or later—and to one or two intimate friends who spoke to her on the subject Sophia expressed herself with a sarcasm which was, perhaps, not fair, and was certainly not prudent. Some kind friend was at the pains of telling young John Done in what terms of ridicule and contempt Sophia had mentioned his name. This gentleman in his own person does not come before us, and it is enough to say that certain disclosures which reached poor Sophia's ears about this time concerning the conduct of Percival Brent in Australia were indirectly communicated to her by her insulted admirer, who, as has been said, had met Sophia's lover when abroad.

There resided in Kettlewell a widow of good family and small fortune, by name Mrs. Hands; and Mrs. Hands, relishing the fat living of the house of Done, and the house of Done being gratified by the aroma of aristocracy which hung around Mrs. Hands, there came about an alliance between the two, offensive and defensive, which was always most enthusiastically maintained on the widow's side about lunch and dinner-hour.

Mrs. Hands was a woman who had seen a great deal of the world, and could converse agreeably. She had a

beautiful set of teeth, which made her smile a great deal, and a jolly laugh, which caused people to feel comfortable, and between the laugh and the smile she had a reputation for thorough good nature. She was known in every house in Kettlewell; she carried gossip with the punctuality of a postman; she had broken off two matches by her solitary act and deed; she was a kind of parlor earthquake, making splits and fissures and shakings innumerable in hitherto stable households; and yet for all this the true character of Mrs. Hands was not suspected, and everybody said she was such a good-humored woman that it was a pleasure even to see her. Which shows, reader, what can be done with a beautiful set of teeth, and a smile and a jolly laugh discreetly inserted in the talk now and then.

Mrs. Hands was no favorite with Mrs. Temple. That prudent woman, mindful of an enemy's craft and malice, never said what she thought of the widow; but she knew, and the widow knew. In her way, Mrs. Hands feared the superior and more scientific worldling, as was shown by the contraction of her smile and the reduction of her laughter whenever Mrs. Temple was by. But Sophia liked the widow, and thought she had a good heart.

One morning, about four months after the Done episode, Mrs. Hands called on Sophia; and there was to be seen in her face a remarkable solicitude and depression, so much that Sophia asked, after a little casual talk, if anything had disturbed her?

"Disturbed me!" the widow exclaimed. "Oh, Sophia! my heart is bleeding this morning!"

"For what?" Sophia asked. "For anybody I know?"

"For yourself, dear girl. Now I will not keep you in suspense. Is it not true—I know it is true—that you are

still in your heart keeping up with the clergyman's son, Percival Brent?"

Sophia turned as white as death. Two or three strange whispers about Percival had reached her ears from different quarters in the last three weeks.

"Have you any news of him? Is he ill?" she asked, and yet illness was not what she feared.

"Sophia, dear girl," the widow said, regarding her with eyes that absolutely moistened—by what art or emotion I know not, nor could the widow have told herself—"Percival Brent is a bad young man—unworthy of you—unworthy of your love."

"What do you mean?" Sophia asked, drawing herself up with a kind of proud rebuke, which yet had a threatening of tears in its very indignation. "Nothing bad can be true of him."

"Nothing good, Sophia," the widow replied, shaking her head religiously. "It is sad for me to tell it to you, but it is my duty, dear—and my privilege too, for who would see you sacrificed to such a fellow?"

"You must not talk so," Sophia said. "I can't listen to it."

"Now wait, dear, wait," the widow rejoined, with perfect temper. "Hear me for two or three minutes, and then say what you please, or do what you please. My conscience will be clear."

"Go on," Sophia said, in a less resolute tone.

"In the first place, dear, he has not been succeeding in his trade—business, whatever you call it. He has lost everything—or the person with whom he was in partnership has lost everything, or has died, or something unlucky, anyhow—Brent is nowhere at all in money matters."

"That he cannot help," Sophia said, and her heart revived.

"Perhaps not, dear, but he could help being idle ; being fond of fast company ; being fond of drink—or, at least, of being at places where people do drink, and all that sort of thing. This has been his ruin, for ruined he is."

"I don't see much in what you say," Sophia replied. "Whenever a young man fails in life people are ready to blame him, and ready to say, 'What could you expect?' and all that."

"Yes ; but smoking, dear—drinking—fast society !"

"Well, he always smoked, and he always drank wine," Sophia answered hotly. "I suppose for once he has taken a little too much, and of course spiteful people say that he drinks, and has ruined himself by it."

Had she really spoken her whole mind she would have said, "One offence he has never committed—he has not been false to me ; and therefore his peccadilloes shall be forgiven."

"Sophia, Sophia !" the widow exclaimed, "there is more than that. How young you are to think such things ever go alone ! Percival is—well, my dear, he is not over-particular about his morals, and that's the long and short of it."

"Tell me all you know," Sophia exclaimed, turning on her visitor almost fiercely, and with eyes that enforced an instantaneous reply.

"Well, then, my dear, he has been untrue to you."

"Married !" Sophia gasped, "to—to Bessie Warren ?"

"Never heard *that* name," replied the widow. "And he is not married—but a great deal worse. He is well known out there for his liking for fast women, and he has

made quite a scandal of himself with an actress—a married woman, I believe, only her husband is in England, I am told.”

“How do you know all this?” Sophia asked. Her voice was scarcely audible, for she was now sure that her lover was false.

“One of my little birds told me,” the widow replied, with a jauntiness that sickened poor Sophia. “Forget him, dear. Be a girl of spirit. Treat him as he deserves.”

“How do you know all this?” Sophia repeated, putting her hand to her forehead, and speaking in a tone of genuine anguish. “Tell me how you know it?”

“Well, dear, if you must hear everything—and perhaps it is better—look here.”

The widow drew from her muff a newspaper, and, opening it, pointed to a marked paragraph. The paper was an Australian one, and the paragraph, as will be seen, was composed with that engaging ease and lightness of touch which are characteristic of certain colonial journals.

“CARRIAGE ACCIDENT IN THE SUBURBS.—Yesterday evening, as Percival Brent was driving Mrs. Lanigan to the theatre, after a pleasant lunch in the country, the horses ran away, probably having had too much dry champagne—a beverage which, though it never affects the driver, is sometimes known to have had an exciting effect on the steeds. After a wild career through the streets, the vehicle was turned over close by the theatre, and the occupants thrown into the street; after which, lightened of their load, the inebriated animals proceeded to drag the vehicle to smash with amazing celerity. Young Percival got a heavy cut on the left temple; but Mrs. Lanigan, marvellous to tell, came off wholly uninjured. In spite of his bleeding brow, Percival was on his feet again in a moment; and, mindful of the poet’s advice, he went to Mrs. Lanigan’s side, ‘to take her up tenderly,’ and ‘lift her with care.’ The news of the accident and its happy termination soon

spread in the theatre ; and when Mrs. Lanigan appeared on the stage, the house rang with plaudits. Nobody thought of poor Percival ; his countenance being of value to himself only, while Mrs. Lanigan's is dear to the public."

"A word in your ear, dear," cried the widow, when Sophia had finished.

And she whispered something at which the poor girl's cheek broke into a flame.

"Now, Sophia," she said aloud, "have I not convinced you?"

"I feel a little tired," Sophia answered. "I don't know what to think just yet. If you will excuse me, and look in another morning, I shall be glad."

"Certainly, love," the good-humored widow replied, not sorry to be free, now that her work was done. "Don't be cast down. It is all for the best. You will soon get a husband. Think of Mr. Prendergast, or, better still, think of that excellent young fellow, John Done. He is dying for you still ; I am sure of it."

"Look in another day," Sophia said mechanically, and the widow took herself off.

Poor Sophia stood silent, just where Mrs. Hands left her, still holding the hateful paper which had stabbed her to the heart. She was numb and stupid with the blow. For this, then, she had loved and waited in uncomplaining constancy for nearly six years ! Only to learn that her lover was a rake, satisfied and pleased with the caresses of a light dame like Mrs. Lanigan, unworthy of her affection, or the affection of any true woman ! Had there been any excuse for him, even had it been the blaming of herself, gladly she would have pleaded it before her own judgment now. Had she been married to him she might have disappointed his expectations, and so driven him to

other women for pleasure. Had they even been meeting occasionally she might not have been warm enough, charming enough; twenty excuses might have been urged in his behalf. Now the fault must be all his own. She had kept her vow, and had found the joy of her life in keeping it. If any doubt of him had crept into her mind at times, she had rebuked it instantaneously. With her whole soul, morning, noon, and night, and with an almost religious punctuality, she had cherished his memory, encircling it with her warmest memories and her purest prayers. And here he was exchanging her love for the favors of an actress, who sold her smiles with as quick an eye to profit as a shopman sells his wares. The downfall of Sophia's hopes was complete. The most refined ingenuity could not have discovered a more perfect and total form of torture. Her whole life was turned into a wilderness. Her mother was right. Better live for the world; better marry for money; better lay hold of material comfort and the pleasures of sense and fashion. These had no power to break and crush the heart like lofty ideas refuted by reality, and devoted hopes crushed by hard fact. With all these thoughts whirling through her brain in a struggling crowd, Sophia stood on, stony and tearless, in the centre of the room, until suddenly the door was thrown open and Mrs. Temple's maid came flying in, with her cap disordered and dismay in every feature.

"Come, miss! come quick!" she called out. "Come upstairs; missus is going on so queer! Oh! don't lose a minute, miss—not a minute!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN WHICH THE TIMEPIECE OF ONE GAY LIFE BEGINS TO STRIKE THE MIDNIGHT QUARTERS

SOPHIA found her mother seated on the edge of the bed, pale and exhausted, but with nothing about her to account for her maid's sudden excitement. The old woman passed her hand feebly across her forehead, trying, it seemed, to collect her thoughts, and then began to speak.

"Have I been asleep? I must have been asleep! Where is Jones? Did I not see her here? Oh, Sophy! I have had such an odd dream! I thought there was a ball here—in this room; and yet my bed was here too, and I lying on it; and between the dances a girl in a blue dress, whose face I could not see, came and sat on the bedside; and she had a lover with her; and they were toying and kissing; and then I called out something, and afterwards awoke. I suppose I awoke. I had not known I was asleep."

The maid subsequently told Sophia that, so far as she knew, her mistress had not been asleep at all; that all of a sudden she began to call out very loud, as if she were scolding; and that in the midst of a torrent of words she became deadly pale and seemed to faint away. Seeing this, the maid had rushed off for Sophia, and upon their return the old woman was come to herself, and sitting down as Sophia had found her. The doctor being sent for, made the usual inquiries and examinations, and ordered his pa-

tient to bed for a day or two, saying that she had overtaxed her strength ; but when alone with Sophia he told her that there had evidently been an attack in the brain, which might be the forerunner of something very grave, or might be only a symptom of weakness and old age.

"The latter, I think," he said, as he was leaving ; "your mother is a very aged person, I should fancy, and her last decay has probably begun. How long she may live no one can say ; but she will not be the same woman again, and the rest of her life will be going downhill, how fast or how slow depends on her constitution and our care."

"I told you, Sophy, that I felt a little shaken," the old woman said, when her daughter came back to her bedside. "Don't you remember what I said about the peach-trees ? A little rest, Sophy, will set me up—a little rest. I have had a hard life of it, enjoying myself ; I don't feel tired of that in the least, but every one wants rest sometimes."

There followed the contraction of life which is the sure token of advancing age. Old Mrs. Temple got up late ; she seldom drove out, and then only at the sunniest hours ; and she had all through the day her little delicacies—turtle-soup in tablespoons, champagne in tiny glasses, and all the usual dainty forms of nourishment for wasting lives. Sophia remarked, however, that her mother was more than ever solicitous about expense.

"I declare it is a sin to be eating this soup," she would say. "How much is this a quart ?—a guinea, I dare say. And as to sending to Gunter's, Sophy, it is waste—sinful waste. You would get it quite as good at the confectioner's here. Fancy if I went on with champagne and turtle at this rate for a year or two, why, money would come to an end, Sophy—money would come to an end !"

Everything pointed in one direction : Mrs. Temple was

living on capital, and she dreaded the approaching exhaustion of her means. Sophia tried to get some knowledge of her affairs.

"Could not I do that for you, mamma?" she asked one day, as the old woman was figuring over her bank-book.

"You, Sophy!" she answered, with a gleam of her former vivacity. "You, dear child! you would not know which side is which—which is the mother and which the banker."

"Let Archibald help you, then," Sophia rejoined.

"Archibald, indeed!" the old woman exclaimed. "That great man stooping to my little bit of business would be like a camel trying to get through a needle's eye. No, thank you."

Elsewhere, too, some gleams of her old spirit broke through the clouds of weakness and illness, but Sophia, watching her narrowly, thought the vivacity only assumed. Even now she fancied she could discern a look of deeper care on the old woman's face as she returned to her calculations. Next day they drove to the bank, and feeble as Mrs. Temple was, she insisted on going in alone; and she had a long interview with the manager. When she came out she showed Sophia a roll of notes.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, Sophy," she said. "I shall put it in my drawer, and if I am not able to get out again this winter there will be money enough to go on with. I don't wish any one to go to the bank about my business again—mind that; and you need not pay any bills just at present. What ready money is wanted we can take out of this,"

All this was alarming to Sophia. She was not the girl to give way to covetousness at a time like this; but who, without uneasiness, could face the prospect of supplies

perhaps suddenly cut off at the most trying juncture? As to herself, Sophia did not feel much anxiety. Had Percival continued true to her, how gladly she would have put any fortune she might have inherited into his hands to repair his loss! but now she was not interested enough in life to fear poverty. Beyond care for her mother, she imagined there was nothing to live for. She had tried, even after Mrs. Hands's visit, to disbelieve the reports which had seemed so fatally authenticated; but the very next day Sibyl told her that she, too, had heard from another quarter the most indifferent account of Percival. At this Sophia became hopeless. It was curious that the only person to whom she said anything about her trouble was Prendergast. Whatever had passed at the time of his proposal had set up something like an intimacy between them; and one day when he called, noticing that she looked pale, he made some remark upon the trial her mother's illness must be.

"It is not mamma," she replied; "that I could bear; but oh! I feel so weary and sick! I have heard such dreadful things about the man I believed loved me. Have you heard anything? Oh! do you believe it all?"

"I am afraid Brent has forgotten himself," Prendergast replied, gravely, and said no more.

Meanwhile her sisters, with the above exception, maintained on the subject an ominous and dreary silence; and her mother, whom she carefully kept in ignorance of her reports, never mentioned Percival's name. So poor Sophia, with her broken hopes, went her dull round from day to day, nursing her mother and communing with her own sad heart, and there was not one ray of cheerfulness in her life. She grew pale and worn; and, though she tried to be cheerful, every one could see that care was eat-

ing her spirit and strength away. Certainly the contrast of her appearance with that of Caroline, or even with that of Sibyl, was a warning against living for an idea in this worldly world. The other sisters might not, indeed, have grasped the whole substance—in this life who does? But Sophia's very shadow had vanished away, and she was quite alone, and destitute not only of pleasure, but of illusion too.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN WHICH MRS. BARBARA TEMPLE, IN THE CHARACTER OF
ECCLESIASTES (NEW VERSION), DELIVERS A FAREWELL
SERMON ON LIFE

WINTER darkened on apace, and, while the old woman's health more visibly declined, Sophia was pained to find that she would not allow the idea of death to come near her. From occasional remarks that she let fall it seemed that Mrs. Temple was wilfully maintaining this delusion of returning strength, with an under-current of conviction that she was to die after all. But to Sophia she always spoke as if her recovery were a certainty ; and she even said one day, "Next year I shall go to Paris, and the year after that to Vienna."

"Mamma," Sophia said seriously, when she heard this extraordinary speech, "next year ! and the year after that ! Does it never strike you how uncertain life is ?"

"Of course life is uncertain," the old woman replied briskly. "I never knew the time when it was anything else. But we must make our arrangements, and then take our chance. You were taught to dance when you were seven years old, although you would not require it for nine years more ; and life was as uncertain then as now. Still, it would never have done not to have taught you to dance."

"Yes ; but when one is weak and sick these things seem to come nearer—don't they, mamma ?" Sophia said, with the greatest tenderness.

"Seem to come, Sophy! They do come nearer. I wish they did not. But that is no reason why we should bring them nearer still by our own reflections and guesses."

"But, mamma," Sophia said, now resolved to press the matter, "ought we not at such times to think a little about the other world, and prepare for it?"

"Prepare for the other world!" the old woman exclaimed impatiently. "Tell me, how shall we do it? You talk as if one could make ready for the other world like a flower-show or a ball. I don't know anything about the other world. I hope everything will be right, but there is nothing I can do."

"See a clergyman, mamma," Sophia said, growing timid before her mother's unwavering hardness. "See Mr. Knox; he is very kind, I am sure, and not the sort of man to excite you."

"Very well, Sophy," her mother retorted, getting a little flushed with excitement, but speaking with sarcastic self-repression, "let us suppose Mr. Knox comes to see me. I can tell you what will happen. He will have a black book with him, which at first he will try to keep out of sight, and he will edge it into view as he is talking about the weather. That will be a signal to me of what is coming. Then he will begin by saying that this is a world full of pain and care and trouble." She hit off the clergyman's voice exactly, but more, it seemed, from her old habit of ridicule than from any present wish to be flip-pant. "If I say what I think, I shall answer, 'Not a bit of it; it is a cosey, bright world enough, and I never complained of it.' Then he will go on and talk about loving the world. 'Well, I ought to say, 'I do love it, and never more than now, when I am shut out from it.' 'Yes,' he will say, 'but people ought to be serious.' 'Serious!' I

shall answer—"believe me, the person who produces one hearty laugh from another does good in the world. Serious, indeed ! give me round faces, not long ones." Won't this be improving talk, Sophy, and do good to me and good to Mr. Knox ? Then he will talk about sickness being a blessing ; and if I give him my mind, I shall say that sickness is one of the few things I know which is an unmitigated bother and perplexity. Won't that make Knox whistle ? He will feel he must put me down, and next he will say we are all sinners. What then ? If I say the truth, I shall answer, 'I don't see it. I have done my best in life. I have not been a liar or a thief or cruel. Enjoyment came to me, and I took it, and what a fool I should have been if I had not taken it ! But I have tried to be a good mother and a kind friend, and though I don't mean to say that I have not often been in fault like other people, still I have never done anything to make a fuss about. The Almighty won't judge us for mistakes and little slips of temper—that I am quite sure of. I have always gone to church when I could ; and if there is any better way to Heaven than that, I don't know it, nor anybody else.' So please, Sophy, don't have Mr. Knox here ; either I say what I do think, and shock him, or I say what I don't think, which is not likely to do any good to anybody."

"But, mamma," Sophia went on, "do you never feel as if you wanted something better than this world ? It is very happy and all that while it lasts, but do you *never* wish for another ?"

"Never, Sophia !" her mother replied, now with distinct harshness in her voice. "I have told you a hundred times I am satisfied with the world, and with other people and with myself. I tell you I find only one fault with the world—I want it to last, and it won't."

This reply was delivered in a way that finally closed the conversation, and Sophia never dared again to allude to the subject.

December drew to its close, and she saw that her mother was more and more declining in strength, and that even her insatiable appetite for the world itself was departing. She no longer cared to hear the talk of the town. Her beloved *Morning Post* would lie day after day unopened. The little meals, which she used to take with the eagerness of one who is determined to overcome illness, were now languidly put aside to another hour. She slept more frequently, and everything showed plainly that she was quitting the stage of the world, where, a popular actress indeed, she had so long and so brilliantly figured.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN WHICH SOPHIA HAS THREE COUNSELLORS, AND THE
LAST LEAF OF A WITTY LIFE IS WRITTEN

NOR was poor Sophia left alone with her sorrow. We have all friends in this world—some who wish us well, and some who wish us nothing of the kind. Ill-wishers and well-wishers sometimes are equals in making us uneasy. And thus it was with Sophia, for while she was shut up with her mother in the sick-house various persons found opportunity to disturb her with counsel or warning. The indefatigable Mrs. Hands, who had fully made up her mind that the young woman must and should marry John Done, managed to work her way into the house several times. Sophia now feared and hated the widow in equal parts, although she could not deny that, in telling her the truth about Percival, she had acted the part of a friend.

“My dear Sophia,” this energetic dame said, “I hear that Brent is coming home—bankrupt, they say; character and cash both gone! I should like to see you comfortably settled before that time, and in a position to treat him as he deserves. Now, while your mother is still living, and able to be comforted, settle yourself, Sophia, settle yourself. My dear, *I* know one young man at least who would be at your feet in an hour after the time I told him there was a hope that you would change your mind and say ‘Yes.’ I know the young man.”



"Thank you," Sophia replied hastily. Her cheeks were on fire at the bare idea of seeing Percival again. "I shall stay with mamma to the last, and I am not going to marry any one."

"Certainly not a man who has treated you badly," the widow said, resolved to pledge Sophia to this much at least.

"I am not going to marry anybody," Sophia repeated tartly.

She had another counsellor. Egerton, having heard that Percival was returning, ventured to advise Sophia on the whole subject.

"It is not his being a little wild, Sophia, that I should so much object to," he said. "We are all that sometimes; I mean all young fellows, not girls, though I said 'we.' I had what we call 'an affair' with Miss Johnson at that glove-shop myself many years ago, and it went so far that once or twice we were on the point of going out walking together, and all that sort of thing—you know what I mean, Sophia; but it was the time for the equinoctial gales, and the weather got unsettled, and that stopped it; and then I got engaged to Caroline, and she was such a tremendously fine girl that she steadied me. I don't want to find fault with Percival Brent, who is not half a bad fellow, I think. But you are not the woman for him, Sophia; that is where it is—you are not the woman for him. In every case a woman ought to be the woman for a man. A man of Percival's sort ought to be engaged to a woman with a whip in her hand. Some of us—I mean the fellows with go—want to be influenced, and things to be brought to bear on us, and we want forcible feminine character about us, and the rest of it, and in such cases there is nothing like a woman with a whip in her hand."

More solemn and weighty words were addressed to the poor heart-sick girl. Goldmore no sooner heard that Percival was coming back than he became sincerely alarmed for Sophia's future.

"I tremble for that girl," he said to his wife one morning, "kind, impressible, virtuous as she is. I wish she would accept Prendergast, who is as much in love with her as ever, and to whom fortune will make no difference. I greatly fear—I very greatly fear—that Sophia will be very poor at her mother's death. Everything points that way. But she is the sweetest of girls," he added, in tones of solemn approval; "she is a sister you may well be proud of, and she shall never want a brother while I live, Sibyl. She shall live here if she will make this house her home."

"I don't know that Sophy would care to live here," Sibyl answered curtly. "She is fanciful and quixotic. Perhaps she will marry Percival Brent after all."

"Not after his improper behavior," Goldmore remarked, with the solemn morality of a Great Briton.

Sibyl laughed a little.

"Women forgive that sometimes," she said.

Accordingly, Goldmore, in fear of something which he could not quite define to himself, resolved to give Sophia the benefit of his experience of life. His kindness and his good intentions were undoubted, and his words were those of a man who "knows."

"Don't be deceived by that soft, forgiving heart of yours into marrying a profligate, Sophia," he said. "A young man may fall into many errors, and come out of them and be as good as ever, but a profligate *never* returns to the state of his youth. He may seem respectable, but he is never truly restored. He has lost that

which he cannot regain. There will always be a hardness and a coarseness about him, and he may any hour relapse into evil ways. Such men make a pretence of reforming when they want to marry, and perhaps even believe themselves reformed; but, Sophia, a profligate can no more reform and be what once he was than a man who has lost an eye can see again as perfectly as when he had two. Be firm, Sophia! Be true to yourself. Hear nothing the young man says."

Poor Sophia began to cry.

"I am not saying this thoughtlessly, my dear girl," Goldmore continued, taking her hand. "I admire a young woman who loves a man and will make a sacrifice for him, and I may take the liberty of assuring you, Sophia (so great is my interest in you), that I had resolved, had the young man been honorable, that no little difficulty of a pecuniary kind should have stood in your way. But now, Sophia," Goldmore said, with all the magnate upon him once more, "I must interfere in quite another sort of way."

Late that night, when weary Sophia stole back to her mother's room she found it dark, for the lamp had gone out.

"Are you awake, mamma?"

"Is that you, Sophia?" the old woman answered, in a clear and singularly collected voice. "That girl in blue is here again, you see."

"What, mamma! Where?"

"Here, at the end of the bed, and that young fellow with her. They have been dancing, and came here afterwards. They have not spoken to me, not a word. Only they sit there kissing and laughing. I don't object to laughing, or kissing either; only they should not choose

this place, where so many people are passing up and down. But, Lord! how young people will go on!"

Time after time during several days the old woman would imagine that the bedroom was a ballroom, and that the girl in blue and her lover were sitting at her bed's end, flirting and misbehaving themselves in a way which tickled the old woman; for she often laughed aloud, and said over and over again,

"Lord! how young people will go on!"

At last, on Christmas Eve, Sophia was sitting beside her, and she spoke all at once in a low, penetrating whisper,

"Sophy, I know who that girl is now."

"Who, mamma?"

"*Myself, dear—myself.*" She uttered this in a whisper of secrecy, low, but intensely clear. "I saw the face just this moment. And that is Jack Dallimore—'Spider Jack' we used to call him, he was so thin; but he was clever, and so handsome! We stole out together during the dance at Lord Mountjoy's. There he is kissing her again! How cold it is! Let us go back!—let us go back!—let us go back!"

She turned and composed herself to sleep, and all night long she lay placidly. When the doctor came in the morning he found her much weaker, and said she must have brandy every half-hour, for she was sinking fast. But she would take nothing—only slept away, while hour by hour the beating pulse reported failing strength. Sophia, feeling the end was near, sent word to Car and Sibyl; and the three sisters watched beside her all the afternoon, while Egerton and Goldmore waited downstairs. The breath grew fainter; fixed lines came out on the mobile face; the three daughters stood round the bed; and the worldly little mother passed away without a pang.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHICH YOUNG LOVERS ARE TO PERUSE FOR ANTICIPATION, AND OLD LOVERS FOR RETROSPECT

It was about the middle of January. The funeral was over, and Sophia was sitting alone in the little morning-room which had been her mother's favorite spot. Car and Sibyl had gone home, and Goldmore was downstairs in the library examining the old lady's papers, the greater portion of which had only just now been obtained, as her solicitor had been from home. He had arrived half an hour ago, and, together with Goldmore, was going into the affairs. Sophia sat alone, full of foreboding and dreariness. It was after four o'clock; the sky was sullen gray; a mist was rising all round the house. Dreary, dreary world! Sophia's heart went off—as it had done a hundred times every day for months past—to Australia and Percival, and that odious Mrs. Lanigan. She had in her mind's eye quite a picture of her rival: a tall, handsome woman, with free eyes, a high color, and dark eyebrows and hair. How could Percival have liked such a creature? Then there was the wonder which had haunted her now for weeks. Would Percival come to see her when he arrived in England? Would he imagine she did not know? Could she steel her heart and repel him as she ought?

So constant had these reflections and questionings been of late that what followed was a coincidence only in appearance. "Will Percival come to me?" was actually on

the tip of that inward tongue with which we soliloquize, when her maid came into the room, with an expressive face, saying,

"Gentleman called to see you, miss"; adding, in a kind of unofficial whisper, "*It's Mr. Brent, miss!*"

She had heard all the gossip of the town; but her face and tone signified that, if she were mistress and not maid, Percival should be forgiven at once, and more than forgiven. But Sophia was too agitated for observation. Should she say, "Not at home?"—"Engaged?"—"Cannot see him?" Her heart had almost stopped beating; but, resolved not to let her maid see anything, she said, in as quiet a voice as she could command,

"Show him up."

She gave one hasty glance in the mirror to see that she was fit to be seen, as girls say. Let female seers prognosticate what they will from it, she did not care to meet Percival—even that fickle and false Percival—looking her worst. Then the door opened, and he was ushered in.

The two stood looking at each other in silence for a moment. He saw her pale, worn, and clad in black. She saw him bearded, weather-burned, stronger looking, handsomer than ever. She was ready in her heart-sickness to cast herself in his arms and take her chance. But just then she saw the mark of a cut upon his forehead, and she remembered the accident with Mrs. Lanigan.

Why he had waited that moment I cannot tell. A man never should pause when the woman he loves shows the smallest sign of readiness for his embrace. Perhaps Percival only wished to give the maid time to go downstairs. It is certain that next moment he sprang forward, with his arms stretched out, to take Sophia to his breast; but that little space of waiting gave jealousy time to erect a

barrier before her heart. She would even then have given the world for his embrace, if but it had been honest; but, perplexed, tortured, and at last fairly mad with jealousy, she turned deadly white, and, sobbing, she cast herself on the couch, where, grasping the satin cushion in her hands in a passion of grief or disappointment,

"Oh, I can't, I can't, I can't!" she cried, in a heart-broken voice.

The room was half in darkness, and Percival by no means understood the true cause of her agitation. He came to her side, and, kneeling, took her in his arms without a word. She felt his embrace winding about her, so full of strength! she was nothing in his arms! In her wretchedness she felt thankful that he had taken her so. It was not her doing! She was too frail to resist him. And so he drew her gently up until their eyes met again.

Let me tell you a secret, reader. Some men and women—not many—are born in this world who are honest by nature. Earth-sprung honesty I should call theirs, to distinguish it from that which is the result of sound teaching and example. These people are never so awkward as when they are doing anything mean or underhand; and for the rest of their lives their honesty is proclaimed in their aspect. Such was Percival Brent. He was a simple, straightforward man, true by instinct, and the idea of having been seriously false to Sophia—or that he could have been suspected of such an offence—had never crossed his mind. And now, as he looked down into her troubled eyes, his own, which were dark brown, and very speaking in their way, beamed out steadfast rays of love and truth. There was a little surprise, a little sadness, in the expression; but the clear, strong gaze could never have come from any but a true man. Sophia felt it. Before he

opened his lips she knew she had misjudged him. Already she was beginning to hate herself for her doubts. A moment longer he gazed at her, not, as it would seem, wishing to hurry her kiss; and she grew so impatient to expiate her fault that she was going to kiss him first. He gently held her back.

"Sophia," he said, "do you remember the day we said good-by at The Beeches?"

She nodded her head in answer. She could not speak. Her eyes were running over.

"I could not say good-by. I was too broken—far too broken."

She pressed his hand, to tell him how well she remembered all.

"But," he continued, in a quiet voice, "while I held you to my heart I vowed a vow that when I took my lips away from yours I would never touch a woman's lips again until ours met once more."

He stopped.

"I understand," Sophia said to herself, with a sudden flash of new interest in his words. "He is going to confess to me about Mrs. Lanigan! I dare say he only flirted with her a bit; and he must have been very lonely in Australia; and no doubt she was very forward—like an actress!"

All this ran through her mind, not only faster than it runs from my pen, but faster far, reader, than your eye travels along the line of words. Without a pause, Percival went on,

"And I have kept that vow, Sophia. I wanted to tell you before I kissed you. You can take your good-by kiss back again, for the lips have been all your own since then."

"Oh! wait—wait one moment!" she cried.

She wished to collect herself for the coming joy. Besides, ought she to kiss him with her eyes wet with tears? So she made ready. Then she turned her warm and melting lips upward, and, as she drank his long kiss, she sighed a sigh of rapture too deep for words, almost too deep for thought. "I am his, and he is mine." Oh! how that pure embrace rewarded her, in one great spell of bliss, for all her waiting and her pain! She forgot everything but her deep happiness. She was in a trance of joy, and all beside joy faded out of her consciousness. There was neither past nor present, neither hope nor fear, neither wish nor regret—all was merged in the full and blessed now!

I declare I will not have my lovers peeped at for the next few minutes. And I shall tell you nothing at all, but let your fancy paint what passed on that sofa.

Glance back over your own lives. Have you ever had such a moment of love after years of pain? Just recall your own sensations, and leave Percival and Sophia to enjoy theirs undisturbed, as happy lovers should.

Even when their first transports are over there they sit, exchanging at slow intervals one low-spoken sentence for another.

So at full tide on some quiet coast a wave breaks with a low splash of music on the shore, and then there is silence, and then another wave answers in the same murmuring note, as in its turn it lays its head on the golden beach. Or so, deep in the woods at summer noon, when all beside is rest and stillness, one singing-bird trills out a few deep notes of passion, and then the golden stillness recurs, until the mate answers from another tree in notes as laden with music and tenderness. Break, shining sea,

wave after wave of joy ! Sing, birds of love, and let the voice of your passion go to and fro from breast to breast ! And you two pure and faithful hearts, touch each other at last, and tell in what language you please that earthly paradise is here, within your clasping arms.

"But, Sophia," Percival says at last, "for what possible reason did you behave so very oddly when I first came into the room ? I really thought you were angry or frightened. What could you mean by it ?"

He laughs ; but when he looks at her, he sees her lower lip give a twitch, and she makes a little shivering noise as if she were going to burst out crying.

"I suppose you have had so much trouble lately," he says tenderly. "Think no more about it, dear."

She hated herself for her doubts. She would confess all to him. No, she would not. Yes, she would. Then at last she answered,

"It was not my home troubles, Percy. It was—it was—"

"What was it ?" It is so sweet to bend over her and question her in this low voice.

"Well, you know, it was—it was—"

He sees that twitch of the lip once more. He sees her eyes move round the room, as if looking for something, but she stops again.

"What *can* it have been ?" he asks a third time.

Then all at once she looks up, laughing like a shining April shower, though her voice trembles still.

"It was nothing—nothing in the world, but that I was so delighted to see you—dearest, dearest darling !"

She seals that statement with a kiss. But, my moral young woman, we have caught you telling a decided fib.

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH YOU SHALL SEE LADY RIVALS WITH THE SEAS BETWEEN THEM

AFTER these first transports were over Sophia noticed that her lover spoke in a voice of sadness, and not with the exultation which so joyful a meeting might be supposed to inspire. Sophia at once remembered what she had been told of his ill-fortune, and made no doubt that he was dejected by the thought of it. She could not understand what dejection meant just then, being in so happy a mood that her spirits flew far above every vulgar care.

She had a kind of feeling that all would be well somehow ; but she asked her lover tenderly if any anxiety pressed upon him, and he at once told her the truth.

"I have not prospered," he said sadly. "Complaint always comes with a bad grace from one who is unsuccessful, but I assure you I have not had a fair chance. The man with whom I was working promised to take me into partnership, and all seemed to go well for a while ; but we had a quarrel."

"About what?" Sophia asked, with keen interest. "Was Bessie Warren in the quarrel?" she says to herself. She tosses her head, with a little of the triumph of the woman who has won the man. Percival is as unconscious of it as Miss Bessie Warren herself can be.

"Oh ! as to what we quarrelled about, that is not of any

great importance," Percival replied, with a little hesitation. "A short time after his daughter—"

"So!" Sophia thought—"I was rather expecting her to come in somewhere here."

"—his daughter," continued Percival, "got engaged to another man—"

"To *another* man!" exclaimed Sophia. "Had she an affair with any one before?"

"How sharp you girls are in love-matters!" says plain Percival, not seeing her drift, however. "It was not exactly an affair; I think she took a liking to a man who would not take a liking to her."

"Now, just tell me," Sophia said, stopping him here—"was she pretty?"

"How quick you girls are to ask about each other's faces!" cried plain Percival again. "She is in Australia, and you here. Pretty or plain, what is it to you?"

"I want to know," Sophia said—"and know I shall. Was she pretty?"

"Very pretty indeed," Percival answers.

"And you say she took a liking to a man who did not take a liking to her?"

"Yes; he did not care for her."

All through his life Percival never understood why, just at this moment, Sophia got a little closer to him, and pressed his hand so kindly.

"Go on, Percy," she said—"tell me more."

"Well, she engaged herself to another man, and he and I never got on; and then the old man became rather disagreeable, and nothing went right, and it ended in my throwing the thing up; and here I am, Sophia, quite penniless. Indeed, dear, if it had not been for what you hid in that pocket, I should not have been here to-day."

He stopped, and shook his head sadly.

"Never mind, Percy!" Sophia said gayly. "You are here in safety. Something will turn up for you. Archibald will get you something, I am sure. Archibald makes a pet of me!"

"No," cries proud Percival; "I have got the promise of a situation in Sydney—a capital situation, too—and out there I shall go and work my way."

At this Sophia's face fell, and she was about to speak with great eagerness, when the maid came in and announced that Goldmore wished to see Sophia in the library. Percival was for going away, but she would not hear of it.

"It is my house now," she said, with a sad smile; "you must stay with me a little longer. Wait until I come back."

With a doubting and fearful heart she descended to the library. She was fully prepared for the worst as regarded her mother's affairs, and, alas! money had never seemed so precious in her eyes before. Had she but a fortune now, how happy she and Percy might be! She braced herself, however, for the shock which she felt sure was coming, and opened the library door. Seated at a table, all covered with papers, were her brother-in-law and her mother's solicitor, and by the candle-light their faces, half shaded and half seen, looked very ominous. To Sophia, at least, everything seemed gloomy. Goldmore rose from his seat solemnly, and set a chair for her at the table, and then, with his usual three-syllable ceremony, began to speak.

CHAPTER XLI

IN WHICH SOPHIA, HER LOVER, ARCHIBALD GOLDMORE, AND
ALL READERS GET A SURPRISE

"WE have been examining, my dear Sophia, your mother's papers, and we are now in a position to let you know exactly how you stand. I have waited before calling you down in order that I might be able to satisfy your mind in all particulars, and not merely read over documents to you which would deal in general terms, and without making the facts of the case clear. I think, as your mother has made a very special communication to you about the state of her affairs—a communication which she wished her executor to read before showing it to you—I think I may now read her letter, and thus it will be she and not I who will tell you how you are left. Shall I read the letter, or will you read it for yourself?"

"Read it, please," Sophia replied, trembling with excitement.

Goldmore drew the candle closer to himself, adjusted his glasses on his nose, and began :

"MY DEAR SOPHIA,—I have for a long time felt great anxiety about you and your future, when I shall be taken from you. For Caroline and Sibyl I am not concerned: they are happily married, and will never want either wealth or counsel. With you the case is very different. You must be aware that your course in life has not been such as I approved of. I regretted, and I shall always regret, that you did not marry when you had a favorable opportunity; and you know well that, in acting as you did, you cast aside

my precepts, and, indeed, disappointed all my hopes. But I am bound to say you never forgot yourself, and your behavior was as mild and daughterly as possible under the circumstances; and I cannot but tell you that your affection for me at that time touched me deeply, even though I was angry. You gave me the idea of a girl who, though acting from a mistaken principle, was doing it in a high-minded way. And, since then, every day I have had fresh tokens of your love and care.

“You three girls will have at my death a thousand pounds apiece. The whole of my remaining income goes back to the family of my first husband. I hoped to have seen you married and settled before I died; but, as this was not to be, I could not think of your being left in so miserable a position. For this reason, while my income was still very large, I resolved, without telling any one, to reduce my expenditure, and lay up a little money for you. I have already accumulated rather more than eight thousand pounds, and before I die this sum will, no doubt, be increased. You will be my residuary legatee, and at my death the sum I have saved will be yours absolutely. I must charge you to be cautious with it. Submit yourself implicitly to the guidance of our good Archibald; and, as you love my memory, and remember the sacrifice I have made, you must not, in any freak of affection, let the fortune slip away. It is meant for your comfort. You will ill repay me if you allow any other person to squander it.

“You have chosen your way in life; and, although it is not mine, I hope you will be happy. Of course, I have no right to force my views on you. You have got to live your own life, and to get enjoyment in your own way. The great thing in life is by some means to get enjoyment out of it, which I sincerely hope you may do. Try, anyway, to be a credit to your mother. Remember, whatever else you do, always dress handsomely and keep up appearances, and think sometimes of your old, worldly mother,

“‘BARBARA TEMPLE.’”

Goldmore laid the letter on the table, and then, with his most imposing air, took up another paper, on which were some columns of figures, set out with great care. He readjusted his glasses, and began afresh:

"The property you receive in this way," he said, "amounts to about twelve thousand pounds, and the manner in which it is invested is most satisfactory. I should like you to glance over this—"

"Oh, Archibald ! not just yet," Sophia said, in great agitation. "To-morrow—another time will do. I feel a little upset. Will you give me mamma's letter, and then excuse me for a while ? I don't think I can speak very much just now."

With an agitated bow to the man of law, she got out of the room.

"Miss Temple is a little moved," the solicitor remarked. "By no means unnatural."

"She is a tender-hearted girl," Goldmore said; adding, in his testimonial style, "I have a high opinion of her."

And Sophia hurried away, not to her lover, but to her mother's room. There she cast herself on Mrs. Temple's bed, and poured out mingled tears of gratitude, grief, and joy, such as I hope, reader, may bedew your memory some day. The little worldly mother, who seemed—and who, in a way, was—so selfish, how kindly she had acted at last ! Sophia thought of her frivolity, her obstinate refusal to make any preparations for death, her absorbed spirit of worldliness ; and then this kind deed coming up like a flower out of her very grave ! She was a tender-hearted girl, as Goldmore said ; but perhaps most of us, one time or another, have felt something akin to the feeling which filled her breast, as, through her tears, she called out, although there was none to hear,

"Mamma ! mamma ! Oh ! if I could only tell you—if I could only have you for ten minutes to tell you !"

CHAPTER XLII.

IN WHICH SOPHIA'S JOY TURNS INTO PERFECT FROLIC

YES, but tears like those—albeit their grief is deep and pure—are ready to sparkle when the next gleam of sunshine comes. Sophia awoke next morning with a dancing heart. She did not see Percival again that night, but sent him a little note asking him to come early to her the following morning. And no sooner was he in the room than she flew to him and kissed him, with pride and delight in every feature.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“Going back to Australia, as I told you,” he answered.

“But, Sophia, you are too good—far too good—to offer to wait for me. I am not going to be a success in life, I am afraid.”

“Oh! I am going to earn my bread myself,” Sophia cried, clapping her hands. “You keep yourself; *I'll* keep myself.”

“Earn your bread!” exclaimed Percival. “How do you mean to do it?”

“Give dancing-lessons, dear,” she answered. “Look here!”

And, with a “tra, la, la” on her lips, she began to turn and whirl about the room, down and up, the picture of honest delight. And Percival looked on in wonder, which at every motion of her figure kept turning into love.

“Dancing-lessons!” he exclaimed. “Where will you get pupils?”

"Here is my first," she retorts, taking him up as she goes by. "Now, sir—"

"Really, Sophia, what is all this for?"

"For twelve thousand pounds, you clumsy boy! There, you are on my toe!"

"Twelve thousand pounds, Sophia!"

"Twelve thousand pounds, Mr. Percival Brent. I am worth twelve thousand pounds!" Now she stops, and looks him full in the face. "By the way, can you tell me how Mrs. Lanigan is?"

Percival turned very red at this amazing question, but there was no guiltiness in his face as he replied,

"How do you know Mrs. Lanigan?"

"How do *you* know her?" Sophia asked smartly. "*I* know her through the newspaper. She was out driving with a friend of mine, and got spilt. Somebody said it was the horses having had too much champagne—the newspaper said that."

Percival muttered something under his breath, which sounded very like some brief and emphatic remark about the newspaper, and caused Sophia to lift her finger.

"Please, not before me," she said. "No colonial language before me. I am not Bessie Warren."

"I thought there was something up, by what I heard in the hotel last night," Percival said, with gravity and reflection. "Tell me, Sophia, have there been any stories going about here not to my credit?"

"Rather," she answered, now serious herself. "Don't mind them."

"Let me tell you the whole truth about that affair," he said. "I was driving with Mrs. Lanigan. The fact was, I was one of a large party in the country that day, and the carriage which was to take her back to the theatre had an

accident, and the friend at whose house she was asked me to drive her in his gig, and I did, and we came to grief. I believe, Sophia, I *had* too much champagne, and that is the truth of it. We had rather too merry an afternoon meal. I drank too much wine, I confess."

"Naughty boy! But tell me—did you sit next to Mrs. Lanigan at lunch?"

"No: at the far end of the table."

"There," Sophia said twice over, putting a kiss between the two words—"there, I forgive you the champagne!"

She forgave him, but the hot fellow would not so easily forgive the slanderous folk who had made free with his name. And if I were to tell how he searched the slander out; and faced Mrs. Hands; and faced John Done, to whom she referred him; and how John Done turned very pale, and declared that Mrs. Hands had taken up in earnest what he had said in jest; and how, to exculpate himself, John Done made all his family quarrel forever with Mrs. Hands; and how Mrs. Hands by the transaction lost fifty dinners and about one hundred lunches annually for the remainder of her life—all this, if I were to tell, would fill more pages than I could compute in a moment, and time and space press, and I must and shall soon make an end. So we go back to Sophia and her Percival.

He will not consent to marry her as a poor man. He will go back to Australia and make his fortune. Note, reader, how she manages him.

"Oh! very well," cries she, tossing her head angrily. "Of course I can't say, '*Will you marry me?*' three times running. You must do as you please."

She walks from him to the window, and looks out, quite in a pet.

"You know what I mean," explains he. He has followed her. "You know quite well what I mean."

"Well, if I do, then you need say no more about it."

And she turns her back on him.

"I only say I can't marry you as a poor man."

"Very well; don't marry me, then."

"But I don't want you to speak in that way."

"And I don't want to speak at all."

"Sophia, you need not be so ill-natured."

She turns round on him, making ready to tell fib the second, which this time was a sizable one without any mistake.

"Oh! I know what it is: you have some other woman out in Australia whom you want to marry, and this is all pretence."

"Want to marry some other woman out in Australia!" Percival cried, aghast at the thought. "Another woman! Why, Sophia, look here!"

He sinks at her feet, and then he presses her handkerchief to his lips—not her hand—humbly signifying that anything about her is dear to him. And she, though not ill-pleased to see how artistically she has brought him to her feet, bites her lip, tosses her head, looks angry still. Then, releasing her handkerchief from his grasp, and putting it to her eyes,

"I know this," she says. "If you really lo-lo-loved me, you would not let this miserable mo-mo-money stand in our way!"

And, quite overcome with grief, she plunges into her pocket-handkerchief, and is lost to his view.

He will have her out; she will not come. He will dry her eyes; she does not want to have them dried. He will make her stop crying; she cries all the more. At last he sinks at her feet.

"Listen, Sophy! I will do anything you please. I will make no trouble about anything. I will marry or not, just as you like, if you only will stop crying. I can't bear to see you cry; I can't, indeed."

"Oh! you dear old stupid!" she cries, unveiling herself at the moment; and there she is—rosy, blushing, laughing, triumphant. She has carried her point and made a fool of him, and she tosses her handkerchief in his face, and flies from the room, killing him with a retreating eye as he tries in vain to catch her.

My wish is that every reader of this delightful tale should, at all convenient places, have the moral lessons of the passage pointed out. Here I will just remark that if any reader is very much in love with a woman, and she wants him to do anything which he does not want to do, he may as well do it at once and save time.

One other fragment of their courtship of later date let me give, just to show how Sophia wove her web around him. She is at the piano, and has been singing "*In questa tomba*" to him. They are alone in the little drawing-room, and Percival says,

"I am so fond of that melancholy music!"

"Melancholy music! Will you have some more?"

"Please."

Ripple and dash, her hands fly across the keys. Ripple and dash, the notes glance off her finger-tips in a kind of audible spray. Then, with one look behind her at him, and a face full of fun, she starts off:

"WE TWO.

"Laugh! if your heart beat light, dear boy!

Alone and merry are we;

For Love is the game, and I am the toy:

So laugh, if you like, at—*me*!

"Sing ! if your heart beat light, dear boy !
Like a lark o'er a sunlit lea ;
Let the first trill be Passion, the next be Joy,
And the end of the music—*me !*

"Dance ! if your heart beat light, dear boy !
There's nobody here to see.
You can be saucy—and I can be coy !
Dance, with your arms about—*me !*

"Just for one hour of heedless joy
This shall our pastime be—
Laughter and singing and dancing, dear boy !
And only yourself and—*me !*"

She ceased, and turned up a thorough flirting face, sparkling like a brook when the sunshine glances on it through moving leaves. Oh ! she was ready for a bit of frolic just then, our grave Sophia, with her seriousness and her natural piety and all the rest. Grave young women frolic at time, my uninstructed reader, and I would have you know it.

But Percival, more prosaic than she—perhaps more in love just then—looked at her, and his eyes grew moist with tenderness and delight as he gazed.

"I don't laugh much, Sophy. I dance badly. I can't sing at all."

"An old, crabbed, awkward thing !" she replied. "His face is crosspatch. His step is a halt. His notes were learned in a rookery."

No, do what she will, she cannot make him laugh—he is too much in love ; and his gaze makes her more serious, too. The twinkling lights in her face pass off. She begins to give him beam for beam, full of earnest affection. Ah ! the brook is running deeper now, and the light falls on it steadily.

"But the awkward boy loves little Sophia more than all the world beside."

"Does he?—truly?"

"More than all the world beside." How old the words are! How new and fresh each lover can make them!

"And will he go on loving—forever and forever and ever?"

"Forever and forever and ever."

"Then," Sophia cried, spreading out her arms, "why are you standing over there, stupid thing? Don't keep me waiting any longer. Come and kiss me."

CHAPTER XLIII.

LADY RIVALS, WITH THE FOOTLIGHTS BETWEEN THEM

PERCIVAL got his own way, after all, as to marrying as a poor man. Fortune, Henry Fielding tells us somewhere, never does things by halves. Two months after, Percival's uncle died, and it was found that, in spite of his wife's cajoling, he had remembered his nephew; and, though the bulk of his property went to his stepsons, he left Percival the fifteen hundred a year which he had so long allowed to his father. So Percival did not marry as a poor man after all; and the little mother, had she lived, might have confessed that sometimes love finds out the way to fortune, too.

Wedding-bells come ringing in as my story nears its end. Sophia Temple is the bride the sun shines on. It is a quiet marriage, but loving eyes are about her and upon her. Seven long years she has waited, and now the day has dawned that makes her happy. All is sunshine. The little wedding-feast is full of pleasantries. Egerton Doolittle makes a speech, in which he assures the company that he always maintained, in the face of everybody, that Sophia would find some one to marry her some day. He did not exactly mean what he said, but that some one would turn up; for he had heard that there never is a Jack but there is a Jill—not that he meant to imply that Sophia was not most charming, quite the reverse; but still, it requires foresight to say how any giv-

en thing will turn out, and he always said so in spite of everybody, and there the thing was that day, and nobody could gainsay it. And Goldmore hands Sophia solemnly into her carriage, and off they go for life and love, and the story is told.

They come back again and settle in The Beeches, which has lain vacant since Mrs. Temple gave it up. They begin their married life with every promise of happiness, and with the brief sunshine of this life warm and bright about them. May I relate one little incident?

Exactly a month after their return home, Egerton Doolittle came in one morning and asked to see Sophia privately; and when he was alone with her and the door shut, he drew a long play-bill out of his pocket.

"Look here, Sophia," he says, in a voice of alarm—"look at this."

The bill announces that in a neighboring city there is to be, for one night only, a performance of the *School for Scandal*, with Mr. Lanigan as Charles Surface, and Mrs. Lanigan as Lady Teazle.

"I call it a serious thing for you, Sophia," Egerton says. "If you will take my advice as a relative, I should keep Percival in the background. You will observe it is only for one night, and as a prudential matter I should keep Percival in the background."

Does she?

"Come here, sir," she says to her husband, after Egerton has gone. "Do you see this?"

She shows him the play-bill, and he looks a little foolish and conscious.

"I want to see the Lanigan, Percy," she says. "You must take a box for us both to see the Lanigan."

"You are jesting, Sophia!"

"Never was more serious in my life. I must, and I will, see Mrs. Lanigan!"

So the abashed husband has to take a box, and in due time they are waiting for the curtain to rise.

"Now, which is Mrs. Lanigan?" Sophia asks, after the play has begun.

"There," Percival says—"in the satin dress."

"The blue satin dress? Surely THAT is not Mrs. Lanigan?" Sophia puts a very impressive emphasis on "that."

"Yes, that is she," Percival replies, with obvious awkwardness. He feels very much ashamed of having admired her. He can see nothing in her now at all.

"Mrs. Lanigan is not the woman with the long train?" Sophia says, resolved to disbelieve him. In fact, she implies that it is quite incredible that THAT can be Mrs. Lanigan.

"Yes, the woman with the long train," he replies.

"Why, Percival, you said she was so pretty."

"Well, you know," Percival says, "that was in Australia."

"Had she the same nose in Australia?" inquires Sophia, crushing her husband by this sarcasm.

And hereupon Mrs. Sophia Brent sets to work and picks the renowned Lanigan to pieces, from her eyebrows to her toes, and makes it as plain as Euclid to Percival that she is not at all prepossessing; and Percival, having the woman of women at his side, believes all he hears, and begins to remember now that Mrs. Lanigan's complexion was sometimes a little doubtful. So you see, reader, that Sophia, with all her charms, was only mortal woman after all, and would let fly an arrow at a rival as swiftly as any of her sex. And it mattered nothing to Mrs. Lanigan, who was three times recalled. And it

mattered nothing to Sophia, who only wanted to punish her husband, and never loved him more tenderly than that night. And so it really comes to this, that I need not have recorded so trivial an occurrence at all.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN WHICH, AS THE CHARACTERS BEGIN TO DISAPPEAR, THE
MORAL OF THE PIECE BREAKS ON OUR VIEW

I AM beginning to regret that I did not call this "A Circular Novel"; which, besides being a title that might have raised public curiosity immensely, would have pointed to one of the most remarkable features of the production. For the mathematical reader will know that it is the property of a circle—no matter how vast it be—that if you pursue its circumference patiently, you must at last reach the very point from which you start. So here, reader, have you and I been companions for some little time, and on the best of terms, trudging without a murmur the round of this novel, and we now find ourselves in that very dining-room, with its mingling lights, from which at first we started. For the dining-room was Egerton Doolittle's; and among the company were not Sophia only, but her husband, Percival Brent. And now let us ascend to the drawing-room and rejoin the ladies, and with the evening, our novel, too, shall close.

One ponderous figure we miss. Archibald Goldmore no longer moves in the Kettlewell society. Fifteen long years ago that leviathan paid the great debt of nature. The grand reserve which had hung around him all his life long was never, even to the last, ruffled by one fold. Responsible he was, just, good in his own way; but Sibyl never got very near to him. The pair had not a quarrel in their

lives : partly because she stood in awe of him ; partly because he never meddled with her ; partly because each was impassive and cold ; partly because they never loved each other. Love, my reader, is a grand ingredient in quarrels. The husband and wife walked apart through life, and never exchanged one cordial confidence. Even when Goldmore was seized with what he felt inly sure was to be his mortal illness, he did not communicate his foreboding to Sibyl. This was not because he feared frightening her, but only from his way of keeping things to himself. Before long, however, concealment became impossible. The doctor entered the house ; the end was in view.

"Sibyl," the old man said one day, when he was rather better than usual, "I wish to say a word to you." He drew himself up a little, with a faint remembrance in his air of his famous testimonial style. "You have been to me a loving and an honorable wife. When I die you will find that I have recognized all that. You will not be hampered by any foolish restrictions. I desire to return you my thanks"—as if he had been speaking at a public dinner—"for your unvarying consideration and attention to all my wishes."

He paused, and she stood beside him and did not speak, nor show any sign of feeling. She only regarded him fixedly ; and he, after waiting to gather a little strength, added, in the simplest way,

"God bless you, my dear, and watch over you when I am gone !"

And then, although her face moved not a whit, he saw one tear come out and stand on her eyelash, and roll down her cheek. It was the only tear he had ever seen her shed. Perhaps from her it signified more than floods of weeping from an ordinary woman. It was sincere, anyhow—not

assumed ; and Goldmore knew it, and the sight comforted him before he died.

Liberty and fortune he certainly left her, and at the time of his death Sibyl was in the very height of matronly beauty. Her figure was full and rounded, her hair as fresh as when she was twenty, and her movements full of grace and dignity. She was by no means young ; but hers was a style of beauty which Time finds it hard to destroy, and we all expected that she would have married again. This expectation was the more reasonable, because she maintained her more youthful habits. But five years went by, ten, fifteen, and still Sibyl Goldmore did not change her name. And now there appeared upon her most unmistakable signs of age ; and, curiously enough, as her beauty more and more decayed, she seemed more and more resolved to let all the world know what a beauty she thought herself. She grew affected, sat in postures, dressed for twenty-five—we even fancy that she rouged a little.

Meanwhile, her old reserve and her silent ways remained the same. She talked little, and took no pains with her conversation. She treated most people with haughty reserve. Strong and sensible as she was, Sibyl was never able to see that she was growing an old woman, and that the affectation of physical beauty had long ago been ridiculous. I grieve to write it of Sibyl, for whom I have ever felt respect and even regard ; but the verdict of Kettlewell was that she—once a queen in our society—had become—dreadful word—a *bore*!

Caroline, at the same time, had changed with years in quite another way. You remember how well she used to dress?—all these girls dressed well. But Caroline, as she became intellectual, began to neglect her person, and

rather affected slovenliness. She would wear a morning dress in the evening, or go to a concert in a shawl like a parish blanket, which she would pin across her breast with some odd brooch that she might have picked up in Hanway Street. In fact, Car became fearfully blue, and would even talk about Hebrew during dinner, attacking tender young curates who had never seen a Hebrew grammar, frightening the poor young men out of their senses, and ruining a good dinner. In addition to this, she became a woman's rights lady, and made speeches advocating female suffrage. Upon these occasions Egerton used to go to the back of the hall with an umbrella and applaud. Also, if it was a strange town, he would nudge his next neighbor when the speakers came on the platform.

"Can you tell me," he would ask, in a low whisper, "which of these ladies is Mrs. Egerton Doolittle?"

Curiously enough, the stranger was never able to point her out.

"I should like to have seen her," Egerton would say. "People assert she is a tremendously clever woman. Indeed, I know she is. In fact, you may spread it with confidence: she *is* a tremendously clever woman!"

"And in this way, my dear," Egerton would say to her when they got home—"in this way I intend to get your name up. It's the kind of thing that is done with actresses, and—and popular preachers, and statesmen, too, I understand. Some one goes about—perhaps the man's twin-brother—pretending he does not know him by sight; asks, 'Is that the great Mr. So-and-so?' Probably the other says, 'I never heard of the great Mr. So-and-so.' 'How very remarkable!' the twin-brother exclaims. 'Everybody is talking about him. I so wish to see what

he is like.' Exactly my way with you, dear. I shall get your name up, depend upon it."

"I am afraid we shall never get our votes," Caroline remarked, resting her chin on her hand, and speaking in a mood of doleful confidence. It had been a wet evening, and the meeting had been small, moist, and not sanguine. "We are working against hope."

"I should not be disheartened, Car, if I were you," Egerton replied. "Try a little of this pheasant, dear. No? Well, I will. I was going to say I should not be disheartened about the cause. As you said to-night, dear, new truths always have to work their way. Look at my theory about red mullet. I have been at it for twenty years, and yet even to this day that delicious fish is laid on your plate in most houses in Kettlewell just as if it was a package. But that truth will work its way too; and when I am no more"—Egerton said this with a tremor in his voice, and he laid down his knife and fork to deal with certain symptoms of moisture in his left eye—"when I am no more, red mullet will be cooked in my way all over educated Europe."

For poor Egerton remained constant to his great theory about red mullet, and firmly persuaded that a reform in that direction would help on the regeneration of mankind. And in this gentle conviction our amiable milksop will live and die.

We bid farewell to Sibyl, to Caroline, to Egerton. Let the men learn what lesson from Egerton they can or will. I write for the women. And I wish them to observe that Caroline as well as Sibyl sank into a social infiction, lost all power of attraction as years went on; and in both cases I believe the loss arose from simple mismanagement. This story (as every reflecting reader saw long

ago) has as many morals as a hedgehog has prickles. But here is one particular moral spear which I would infix in the minds of my feminine students:

Either Sibyl or Caroline, according to the gifts of persons and of mind, would have outshone Sophia from first to last had they known the secret of charming as she knew it.

CHAPTER XLV.

PICTURE OF A VIRTUOUS HUSBAND, WHOSE WIFE WAS SO DELIGHTFUL THAT HE COULD NOT HELP HIMSELF

I DARE say some of those readers who are never satisfied want to know why in the world I have not told them more about Percival Brent, our Sophia's worthy and happy husband. He was so good and worthy, and so successful and happy after his marriage, that of him there is nothing to tell. What can you say in a story about a man who goes to bed and gets up again three hundred and sixty-five times every year, like all the rest of us? It is your men who either never wish to go to bed, or have no bed to go to, who make the fortunes of us novelists. Percival continued a devoted student of science all his life, and he has already attained a very respectable eminence among men of research.

Sophia loved him well and constantly, and he never wavered in his devotion to her for an instant. His only other mistress was Science, who is a harmless dame, and never broke a wife's heart yet; for, indeed, she rather promotes matrimonial constancy. Children came to these happy two in fair succession—girls and boys, the eldest being at Cambridge when the youngest was yet toddling from chair to chair. I fancy Sophia never quite shared the enthusiasm of her lord and master for the physical sciences; and she did not quite care for all his learned professors, who had not enough humanity for her, but

she always entertained them genially. At times she would fillip her husband a little. For instance, one day hearing him say of a scientific friend, "He is successful and profound," which Percival uttered with unusual deliberation, Mrs. Sophia comes to her husband's side, and, looking saucily over his shoulder, she says,

"By 'successful' my husband means that the gentleman has discovered a new beetle, and by 'profound,' that he believes absolutely nothing."

Which Percival answered with a laugh and a pinch. Beyond these harmless pleasantries there was never a difference on general subjects between the two.

And here is why I have said nothing about Percival Brent. Happy, somebody cries, is the nation that has no history. Happy the husband, say I, about whom the novelist can find nothing to tell. Happy Percival Brent, of whom all we now record is, that he called Sophia his wife; and that she was mother to the children who are now rising up like young palm-trees in that happy home where once down the dining-room floor our merry little mother of long ago stepped her minuet.

But Sophia, Sophia, to you I have not done justice. You are not interesting in my pages. You are interesting in life. Who could make real your thousand little graces of mind and way, of dress and look and speech? I feel that had I drawn a woman who knew the way to administer strychnine safely, and did administer it; or had I written about a woman who had four husbands, but had never realized her ideal, and described her in a cab or a yacht or some other energetic conveyance, flying away to joy with the man of her heart; or had I described a lively young woman who smoked "Three Castles" tobacco, wore a billycock hat sloped on her head, knew how

to swear and whistle—she might have been a success in my hands. But you I have not been able to draw, my sweet Sophia. A blurred, dim tracing is all I have given of your clear, perfect beauty. You will be called insipid; you, whose hands and eyes and presence, had they but been about me, would have made me all I might have been, and now shall never be. Forgive me, who, trying to paint you, have painted only your pale shadow, and who feels now, as the brush slips through tired fingers, “I have tried, and tried, and *failed*.”

CHAPTER XLVI.

. IN WHICH SOPHIA TEACHES LADIES ALL HOW TO BE BEAUTIFUL FOREVER WITHOUT ENAMELLING

BUT with a sigh I shall not end this story. I am resolved to end smiling, and to have my readers smiling too ; for which purpose I have kept an anecdote for the very latest line.

Sophia would sometimes see her friends at little *tête-à-tête* visits, and here she would discourse, as she only could, on all kinds of subjects, or she would let her friends discourse. The charm of Sophia was, that you could never tell exactly whether it was you or she that kept up the conversation. How that woman managed her house and family is quite beyond my comprehension. Manage she did, and well ; and yet, whenever you called on her, morning or evening, there she was, dressed with the best taste, her hair done in faultless style, and all the rest of her attire to match. Ah ! gray-haired Sophia, you knew—did you not?—that one to whom you often vouchsafed those gracious interviews, in all honor loved you with a more than boyish love ? Of what did we not talk ! Literature, music, pictures, history, gossip now and then ; but somehow one always went away from that drawing-room with a more cheerful heart, with nobler views and hopes of human life, with a touch of refinement caught from Sophia. And lovers Sophia had more than one, as he shall see who reads on to the now nearing close.

One morning—well I remember it—as Sophia and myself sat thus alone, Percival being occupied with a fossil, I drew from my pocket that little paper of “Beauty Rules,” of which I told you some time ago, saying that I should like her to explain these axioms to me. She was sitting in a low chair, and had a work-basket beside her, with which she kept up a kind of telegraphic connection, in the shape of a thread which travelled slowly from the basket to herself, as her fingers worked out some mystery in wool.

“Hand me the paper,” she said, laying her needles and work down. “I will read them to you, and explain.”

But here Sophia was seized with a fit of laughing, greatly tickled, it seemed, to find herself lecturing on beauty to me.

“I never showed these to any one except yourself,” she remarked, when her mirth was ended. “And I never meant to show them to any one at all. I dare say you will think them great rubbish.”

And so she began with a comic preface, which was not on the paper at all :

“‘Beauty Rules,’ by Sophia Brent, an elderly lady, who ought to be thinking of other things.

“*RULE ONE.—A woman’s power in the world is measured by her power to please. Whatever she may wish to accomplish, she will best manage it by pleasing. A woman’s grand social aim should be to please.*

“And let me tell you how that is to be done,” Sophia said, putting her paper down for a moment. “A woman can please the eye by her appearance, her dress, her face, and her figure. She can please the ear by studying the art of graceful elocution, not hard to any of us, for by nature we speak with finer articulation than you. She

can please the mind by cultivating her own—so far, at least, as to make her a good listener ; and as much farther as she will she can please the fancy by ladies' wit, of which all of us have a share. She can please the heart by amiability. See here," she continued, growing graver, "you have the key of my system. Beauty of person is only one feature of true beauty. Run over these qualities. See how small a part personal beauty or the freshness of youth plays here. I want you to observe this ; for my art would consist not in making women attractive who are openly pretty and young, but in showing them that youth and prettiness, though articles of beauty, are neither the only nor the indispensable articles."

"In that case," I remarked, "you will hardly illustrate your system in person."

To this she vouchsafed a smile and mock courtesy, and read—

"**RULE TWO.**—*Modesty is the ground on which all a woman's charms appear to the best advantage. In manners, dress, conversation, remember always that modesty must never be forgotten.*"

"Hardly likely to be," I murmured. "Is it?"

"Understand me," answered Sophia briskly. "I mean modesty in a very extended sense. There is nowadays a tendency in women to rebel against old-fashioned modesty. The doctrine of liberty is spreading among us, for which I thank God," Sophia said (she was the oddest little mixture of Tory and Whig and Radical ever compounded on this eccentric earth). "But the first effects of that doctrine on our minds are a little confusing. We are growing more independent and more individual. Some of us fancy that to be modest is to be old-fashioned, and of course we want the newest fashions in all things. I maintain,"

Sophia said, growing a little warm, as if she fancied I might argue back—"I maintain that a modest woman is the reply of my sex to a brave man—you can no more have a true woman without modesty than a true man without courage. But remember, I use the word modesty in a high sense."

"Just what I was going to ask," I said.

"Not prudery," she added. "Prudery is to modesty what brag is to bravery. Prudery is on the surface; modesty is in the soul. Rosalind in her boy's suit is delightfully modest, but not," Sophia said, with a twinkle of her eye—"not very prudish, is she?"

I assented, and thus made way for—

"**RULE THREE.**—*So the woman's aim is to please, and modesty is the first principle in the art of pleasing.*

"Have you anything to say to that?" she demanded.

"Not a syllable," I replied. "I play disciple this morning."

"Very well," she rejoined. "We come, then, to—

"**RULE FOUR.**—*Always dress up to your age, or a little beyond it. Let your person be the youngest thing about you, not the oldest.*

"A very important lesson for women of forty," Sophia remarked, speaking with a seriousness which amused me. "The attempt to dress for young almost invariably leads to a reaction in the spectator's mind, and the traces of years become more palpable and more significant. But a slight and graceful assumption of years in one's dress has an effect directly opposite. May this rule pass?"

I bowed, and she went on—

"**RULE FIVE.**—*Remember that what women admire in themselves is seldom what men admire in them.*

"In nine drawing-rooms out of ten," Sophia said, seeing

me give a look of inquiry as she read this article, "Miranda or Cordelia, as novel heroines, would be voted bores. Women would say, 'We utterly decline to accept these watery girls as typical of us; we want smartness and life.' I don't really care much for Miranda or Cordelia myself. Now, this seems to me to caution us against trusting too implicitly or too far our own notions about ourselves. Another source of misunderstanding comes from the novel-writers. We are the novel-readers, and the novelist is forced to write heroines to suit our taste. He does not want to offend us. Thus it comes about that even the male novelist is too often only depicting women's women, after all. And I believe scores of modern girls are seriously misled for this very reason. They fancy they are finding out what men think of them, when, in truth, they are reading their own notions handed back to them under a pretty disguise."

"Like the cheap wine," I ventured to observe, "made in England, exported to a foreign country to be blessed, and then returned as fine old sherry—highly finished wine."

Sophia laughed with me at this, and read on—

"RULE SIX.—*Women's beauties are seldom men's beauties.*

"Which," she remarked, "is another form of what I said just now, only here I speak of personal beauty. My observation is, that if ten men and ten women were to go into the same company, and each sex were to choose the prettiest woman there, as they thought, you would rarely find that they had chosen the same. If this be so, we ought not to trust ourselves, even as to our faces, without considering that the sex we are to please must in the end settle the question, and will settle the question in its own way.

"RULE SEVEN.—*Gayety tempered by seriousness is the happiest manner in society.*

"By which I mean," Sophia said, looking at me with knitted brows, as if she were about to explain some matter not altogether clear to herself, "that in all our gayety there ought to be a hint of self-recollection. Do you understand me?"

"Not quite," I said.

"This I know certainly," she replied: "the most agreeable women I have met with—and I think the most regarded—have been women of rank, who have been trained with a due regard for religion. Their worldly education had made them mindful of grace and liveliness; their religious education kept these qualities under a particular sort of control, which is perceptibly different from mere good-breeding. It seems to me that vivacity and sprightliness are greatly enhanced by a vein of seriousness. Certainly no woman ought to be a mocker.

"Next," she continued, seeing I did not speak, "comes—

"RULE EIGHT.—*Always speak low.*

"I wonder why I put that down. It is so obvious. In support of it I need only quote your Shakespeare, who calls it 'an excellent thing in woman.'

"RULE NINE.—*A plain woman can never be pretty. She can always be fascinating if she takes pains.*

"I well remember," Sophia said, after reading this, to me, rather questionable assertion, "a man who was a great admirer of our sex telling me that one of the most fascinating women he had ever known was not only not pretty, but as to her face decidedly plain—ugly, only the word is rude. I asked my friend, 'How, then, did she fascinate?' I well remember his reply. 'Her figure,' said he, 'was neat, her dressing was faultless, her every movement was

graceful, her conversation was clever and animated, *and she always tried to please*. It was not I alone who called her fascinating: she was one of the most acceptable women in society I ever knew. She married brilliantly, and her husband, a barrister in large practice, was devoted to her—more than if she had been a queen of beauties.’

“Now here,” Sophia continued, resuming her own discourse—“here was a woman who, excepting a fairly neat figure, had not a single natural gift of appearance. Is not this worth our thinking about—those of us women who care to please and are not beauties born?”

“RULE TEN.—*Every year a woman lives, the more pains she should take with her dress.*

“The dress of us elderly dames,” Sophia said, laughing, “ought to be more of a science than it is. How often one hears a woman of fifty say, ‘Oh! my dressing days are past!’ When,” adds Sophia, “if she thought about it, they have only well begun. At least the time has come when dress is more to her than ever. Remember, from forty to sixty-five is a quarter of a century—the third of a long life. It is a period through which the majority of grown-up people pass. And yet how little pains women take—how little thought beforehand—to be charming then!”

“And now,” she went on, seeing I did not speak, “here comes my last rule—as yet—

“RULE ELEVEN.—*In all things let a woman ask what will please the men of sense, before she asks what will please the men of fashion.*

“I by no means intend,” she added, “that a woman is not to have regard to the opinion of men of fashion, only she should not give it the first place. She will carry the men of fashion sooner by methods that please the men of

sense, than men of sense by methods that please men of fashion. And, besides, listen to the men of fashion. They always praise a woman for things which begin to perish at twenty-five. Even the old men of seventy will talk of 'a fine girl—deucedly fine figure!'” (I wish I could give an idea of Sophia’s slightly wicked mimicry at this passage). “And they will call a woman rather on the decline, when, if she is on the decline, where and what are they? You see, if a woman lives for the commendation of men of fashion she will, if pretty, piquant, or what not, have a reign of ten years. But if she remembers that she has charms of mind and character and taste, as well as charms of figure and complexion, the men of sense will follow her for half a century; and in the long run the men of fashion will be led by the men of sense.

“And there,” Sophia cried merrily, throwing the paper down on the rug beside her—“there are my rules for reforming our little world of women!”

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LAST AND LEAST CHAPTER OF THE NOVEL

I PRAISE my heroine no more—not a line, not a word. Two little anecdotes I tell of her; and with these I leave her to your judgment, my fair readers. The first anecdote, you will perceive, is in the old style, and you will yawn over it. The second is more in our modern habit.

Percival Brent was a quiet, undemonstrative man of science, who never shocked anybody by declaring himself against religion or the “old notions.” But among his particular friends it was well known that he freely accepted the most advanced and (as they are at present considered) the most disintegrating scientific views. (“Now what is this leading up to?” you, my May-blossom student, will ask; patience, little one; turn the leaf, and see how near the end we are). One of his friends, who knew his views, and could speak to him freely, said one day, interrogatively,

“It is a matter of astonishment to me, Brent, that you, with your opinions, still keep up your religious practices so regularly!”

“Let me tell you the reason,” Brent answered. “I am married to a wife whom I love, and admire even more than I love her. For true sweetness of character, liveliness, sense, and virtue all round, I never met her equal. I have often asked myself, ‘What is the secret of her character?’ and I always come to the same conclusion—

that if her religious faith were deducted from her she could not be what she is, but must become a less agreeable and not so good a woman. She has kept me from taking the leap which reason has often bid me take. I cannot renounce a religion which I feel makes her what she is."

A tedious anecdote, reader, however short. Now for number two, which is quite another pattern.

To Kettlewell, not so many years ago, came a man aged forty-three. He was famed as a ladies' man, and something in him must have pleased women, for his success with a certain set was quite undoubted. Perhaps his consummate impudence won their hearts. Be that as it may, he was among them an object of no little curiosity, the more because he was wealthy, and presumptive heir to a title. This man, satisfied with himself, and confident of his power over women, met Mrs. Sophia Brent two or three times. Whether he fancied her to be maid or widow—or whether, knowing her to be married, he meant to enshrine her in a Platonic affection, I cannot tell. This I can tell. This, reader, did actually happen:

That this man of the world, aged forty-three, fell in love with Mrs. Sophia Brent, aged fifty-three, and positively made a downright fool of himself.

Ladies, I am your most obedient humble servant.

THE END

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